



The Leviathan of  
the Covenant

丈月城  
Takedoki Joe  
Illustr: 仁村有志

VIII

MF文庫  
J





「この乳がっ！  
この乳で暗臣を  
たぶらかしたのかあああああああつ！」

あーんん、  
アーンヤさん……  
あああああああああああつ！



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# **Chapter 1 - The Moon Palace**



# Part 1

The critical moment had arrived.

At this very point in time, the greatest and most powerful *enemy* was standing right before Haruga Haruomi's eyes.

Princess Yukikaze—

The black-haired young beauty, dress in a white summer dress. The lovely yet haughty dragon king's human form. Her elegant face bore an expression of excitement and extreme joy, almost like "a little girl who finally got her wish to visit an amusement park."

Simply stated, "she could hardly wait."

(Why is she getting so excited when the opponent is someone like me?)

Hal thought to himself poignantly. He really wanted to stare up into the sky and sigh.

However, Hal carefully avoided her since they were "fated rivals of destiny!" after all. This girl was probably not petty enough to launch an attack while her opponent's gaze was directed elsewhere...

Indeed. The two of them possessed the runes of the Bow and the Arrow respectively.

Among the dragonslaying runes, this pair was a special combination.

Ever since time immemorial, the successors of the Bow and the Arrow in every era would feel strongly drawn to each other, clashing in conflict, to duel intensely—

"...Fated rivals of destiny, huh?"

"Hmm? What is the matter, Haruomi? Why the surprised look?"

"Nothing much. It just struck me how I've come this far by the time I

realized, doing something that really doesn't suit my personality."

"Fufufufu. By this juncture, you still speak incomprehensible words like these."

A dignified smile appeared on the princess' adorable face.

The "flying surfboard" under Princess Yukikaze's feet was her magic wand. Like Hal's magic gun, it was a magic artifact for controlling the power of dragonbane.

Whoosh. The white dragon king jumped down lightly from the surfboard.

Standing the on the same ground as Hal, she stared sharply at him.

The location was a certain middle school's yard—

None of the school's students were within the premises. However, Hal and Princess Yukikaze were silently watched by Asya, who had become a Tyrannos at some unknown point in time, Juujouji Orihime, Luna Francois, Shirasaka Hazumi, as well as Hal's classmates, Mutou-san and Funaki-san.

This was because the duel between Princess Yukikaze and Hal would determine the fate of all humanity.

At this very moment, the white dragon king stood before the cowardly human, speaking with superiority, "No matter. This is part of your style. As a powerful dragon king, I, Yukikaze, shall display great magnanimity, even regarding your unique style as one of many amusements."

"Really? Then I hope you could do me a favor."

"Oh?"

"Actually, about that duel of destiny, I'd like you to postpone it for a few days."

"What?"

Princess Yukikaze suddenly became quite displeased, glaring viciously at Hal.

"Haruomi, I have quietly waited for the conclusion between you and Pavel Galad. Are you asking me, Yukikaze, to wait further?"

"Uh, that's because I just finished such an intense battle."

Not even fifteen minutes had passed since the death of the formidable foe who wielded the Rune of the Sword.

"Let's be honest here, I'm all drained, half dead from fatigue. I'd lose miserably in thirty seconds if I fought you in this state. Unless you're fine with that."

"Mu."

"Since you've already waited until now, what does three or four days more matter?"

"Muu."

Princess Yukikaze bit her lower lip hard, like a sulking child.

Were this a regular battle against a regular warrior, negotiations would be out of the question entirely.

As the defending champion, all the princess needed to do was pummel the weak and exhausted Hal with her overwhelming strength.

However, since the princess wanted an all-out fight against a special Tyrannos—

"Let me be clear on this. My patience has limits, understood?"

"Yes, indeed, but I think your only choice is to wait. I may look fine right now, but an hour ago, I almost died."

"Grrrrr."

The princess frowned with displeasure.



Although this situation was quite bizarre, so long as she desired a spectacular fight more than Hal did, Hal would hold the upper hand in negotiations. It was with full understanding of this that Hal had seized the opportunity to make his proposal.

As expected, the princess agonized for quite a while before speaking unhappily, "...Very well. I shall wait three days and no more."

"Really? Thank you so much!"

"You must rest properly during these three days in preparation for our duel, understood?"

"Of course! Leave it to me, I'm an expert in relaxing and doing nothing."

"Running away is forbidden, got that? You must rest your body and mind for the upcoming duel, staying within my sight at all times, understood?"

"That goes without saying! I won't let your kindness go to waste!"

"Excellent. Then come with me."

"Huh?"

The princess grinned when Hal agreed so readily.

As though responding to a playmate's prank with an equally crude prank, it was a childish smile.

"Fufufufu. I, Yukikaze, shall allow you to rest thoroughly for these three days, but on one condition. You must stay by my side the whole time. Otherwise, we fight immediately!"

"Ehhhhhhhh!?"

The unexpected condition made Hal jump in surprise.

"I'm not going to run away even if you don't go so far, okay!? Regardless, I can't escape a dragon king's eyes no matter where across the Earth I escape to!"

"Yes... You definitely will not escape."

Staring intently at Haruga Haruomi's face, Princess Yukikaze asserted.

Hal felt a chill. He had a feeling, the princess' adorable eyes seemed to possess a dragon king's eyesight, capable of seeing through a person's true character in but a single glance.

"Nevertheless, I know not whether you will listen to me and rest properly. Haruomi, despite your superficial image as a lazy good-for-nothing, aren't you excessively serious in odd areas?"

"Oh, umm—"

The princess was perfectly right. Hal scratched his head.

The princess' age was estimated to be over a thousand despite her child-like appearance and personality. She was apparently a dragon king who had existed since the Kamakura period.

Would Princess Yukikaze be offended if one were to call her "the older the wiser"?

In any case, she smiled smugly, posturing like an elder sister.

"To prevent you from not resting, I shall supervise by your side. Relax, I am not asking you to remain in my presence at all times. All you need to do is recuperate for a period of time by my side."

"No helping it..."

It would be far better than fighting right away.

The instant Hal was about to nod in agreement, he mentally jumped in surprise.

He and the princess were standing in the school yard of a middle school one could find anywhere.

By the time he noticed, there were twenty-four runes of Ruruk Soun underfoot

The sequence of symbols meant "O starship, become my wings." Even the surfboard hovering in the air—a magic wand—began to glow with silver-white light.

"Fufufufu, I knew you would agree. Let us waste no more time. I shall invite you to my territory immediately. Worry not, it will be a comfortable stay."

"Eh? So soon!?"

Staring at the happily smiling Princess Yukikaze, Hal was rooted to the spot.

Standing so close to Princess Yukikaze, he should have noticed something at least, such as focusing one's mind to cast a spell, the flow of magical power, breathing, a look in her eyes, etc.

Without any change, the princess had silently used magic without any sign.

The way she used magic was as natural as breathing!

(This is a super strong skill used by some kind of master!)

In that case—Resistance was futile.

He might have been able to put up a fight using defensive magic, but it was too late by now. The glow from the runes of Ruruk Soun swallowed Hal, seizing him tightly with mysterious power.

As one might expect, the gap between a dragon king and a dragon king-esque human was too great...

Painfully aware of the vast chasm between the two, Hal then heard familiar shouts.

"Harry!" "Senpai!?" "Haruga-kun!" "Haruga-kun!?"

The master-class witch from America, the underclassman who was like a reincarnated angel, the two girls from the UFO Research club who were classmates too—



They were all calling for Hal worriedly.

In addition, there were two others.

"I won't let Haruomi be alone!"

"Don't forget us!"

Two girls rushed over to grab Haruomi.

They were the silver-haired childhood friend and the black-haired Japanese classmate—Asya and Juujouji Orihime. In the next instant, they grabbed Hal, and he felt a mysterious floating sensation.

An illusory feeling like his body was forcibly lifted, as well as an unpleasant sense of nausea.

The two feelings attacked simultaneously. The scenery all around him became contorted.

The school yard and his friends' figures gradually became warped, like a fish-eyed view—

By the time he realized, Hal was in space.

Tens of thousands of stars were shining in the darkness. Orihime was holding Hal's right hand, whereas Asya was holding his left.

Before him was the smiling Princess Yukikaze.

Hal and the rest of them were currently standing at the very center of the cosmic abyss.

Twenty-four runes, "O starship, become my wings," were underfoot in an oval arrangement, glowing like a magic circle.

In the distance below the runes was a magnificent blue planet.

Hal had seen this many times before. They were images taken by observation satellite of the Earth, the planet that nurtured life.

"We will presently arrive at my castle, Haruomi. Welcome."

"Castle... Is it something like the monolith at Old Tokyo?"

The Old Tokyo Concession, formerly the heart of Japan as represented by the twenty-three special wards of Tokyo, was currently under Princess Yukikaze's occupation.

One would be highly likely to encounter the princess by visiting to pitch-black triangular prism of a "Monolith" towering in the Ginza district.

Hal had speculated on his own that the princess had made her base there.

"That is a secondary residence on Earth, a villa of sorts to me. I, Yukikaze, have invited you to my domain located in the sea of stars. Be grateful to me."

"The sea of stars, in other words, I knew it..."

It was what dragonkind called space. Hal sighed.

Thanks to dragonkind's wisdom that he had learned as a Tyrannos, Hal actually understood the instant he looked underfoot. This arrangement of runes was used for jumping through space to traverse between planets.

"So we're travel through space in the flesh, huh..."

"Genbu-Ou... The minion responsible for my transportation is dead. Consequently, I must use magic. Haruomi, you ought to show me your gratitude."

"Taking me to your Old Tokyo villa would've been enough."

"On the other hand, surely I did not invite those two little lasses, you know?"

Glaring at the girls at Hal's sides, Princess Yukikaze grumbled quietly.

The dragon king displayed obvious displeasure. Even the two fairly brave girls were intimidated to the point of straightening their backs.

However, Asya tensed her countenance and spoke candidly.

"I know I might be overstepping my bounds to say this, but I believe I have the right to come along."

"Oh?"

"Because... Although it happened only recently, I am the Tyrannos inheriting the Rune of the Chain, after all. In terms of position, I am Haruomi's equal, right?"

"Indeed that is correct. Nevertheless, you are his equal merely in position."

Confronted with the Earthling girl who held her ground, the adorable dragon king laughed "fufu."

"There are many sorts of Tyrannoi. Putting aside those like Haruomi, who have the necessary achievements... A newcomer who has never fought another Tyrannoi, much less a dragon king, has no right to challenge me, Yukikaze, to a fight."

"....."

"However, I do not dislike your mettle."

"Meaning—"

"Hmph. Do as you wish."

Suppressing her terror and nervousness, Asya had displayed resilient determination.

Perhaps it paid off. Princess Yukikaze generously permitted Asya to accompany them. Then her sharp gaze turned to the other girl—Juujouji Orihime.

At that moment, before the princess spoke, Orihime seized the chance.

"B-Because Haruga-kun and I are partners!"

"Partners'?"

"Meaning we are companions who must not separate no matter what, I suppose? Surpassing the level of an irreplaceably dear friend, the other half to one's soul, an intimate relationship where we can know through the same breath what the other person is thinking... I-In any event, if I were gone, Haruga-kun could very well drop dead all of a sudden!"

Orihime finished in one breath and sneaked a glance at Hal.

"Am I right, Haruga-kun!?"

"Uh, yeah. Juujouji is right. Without her, I can't sleep, I have no appetite either. So I hope you'll agree to let her come with us!"

"Simply stated, she is your minion?"

Hearing Hal concur, Princess Yukikaze inclined her head with doubt in her tone.

"On further thought, I used to enjoy the company of Genbu-Ou. Very well. Black-haired girl, I, Yukikaze, permit your presence."

"Thank you very much!"

Princess Yukikaze displayed generosity probably because Orihime's forcefulness won out.

The white dragon king was a magnanimous maiden to begin with. Just now, she had been displeased only because someone had intruded on her "alone time" with Hal, making her sulk.

(I really don't need this kind of uncute jealousy...)

Hal could not help but smile stiffly.

He reasoned that Princess Yukikaze's feelings for Haruga Haruomi could not possibly be love and admiration. She probably regarded Hal as a rival or playmate.

The princess merely disliked her "duel, belonging to the two of them

only" to be disturbed.

Meanwhile, the one who should be on Hal's side, Asya, had narrowed her eyes for some reason, glaring at Hal and Orihime.

"That explanation just now sounds like you are lovers, Orihime-san and Haruomi, lovers bound together by the red string of destiny..."

"D-Does it really!?"

"O-Of course not. Asya, don't get the wrong idea!"

Orihime and Hal hastily refuted together.

At that moment, Hal noticed that the magnificent Earth, directly below just now, had become a small bead.

Conversely, a beautiful white satellite was gradually approaching.

"Is that the destination...?"

Like the blue Earth, Hal had frequently seen this satellite in photos too.

Always presenting the same side towards the Earth—The Moon. This was the satellite known to Earthlings since time immemorial.





## Part 2

"L-Luna-san! Senpai, Nee-sama and Asya-san have been taken away!?"

"Yes. It seems that we were blindsided."

In contrast to the panicking Shirasaka Hazumi, Luna Francois was quite calm.

"However, the situation shouldn't develop into the final battle immediately as long as Harry keeps things going as the current pace. I don't really know if I should call it fortunate or not, but Asya and Orihime-san went along with them."

The instant after the runes of Ruruk Soun had warped space...

The white princess of dragonkind as well as Hal and his two companions had been swallowed by a ball of white light, flying towards the sky with a "whoosh!"

Fast as a rocket.

"Especially Asya. I don't know what happened, to think that she managed to become a Tyrannos like Harry in such short time. Were this taking place in a Japanese manga, this would be one of those scenes where you tell everyone 'no need to rush'."

"B-But..." murmured Hazumi, who had entered a state of shock when the transportation magic activated.

However, Luna Francois, who had remained calm the whole time, spoke in a relaxed tone like a commander overseeing the whole situation.

"The snow princess is a monster capable of charging into the Science Patrol headquarters from Ultraman as easily as taking a stroll after dinner. Had she the desire, the fight could begin three minutes later. In the end, it all comes down to Harry whether he can stall long enough to recuperate."

"I-I suppose you are right."

"By the way, I deliberately chose not to grab onto Harry just now."

"Eh!?"

"Someone capable of taking control of the whole situation and issuing commands to various parties needs to stay behind... Though I know very well it was an excellent chance to throw caution to the wind, stick to Harry, and show my love aggressively."

Luna frowned, murmuring quietly as though trying to persuade herself.

This would be a display of her calculative wits—calm wisdom—that earned her nickname as the little devil.

"When Harry returns, I will surely have him make it up to me."

"L-Luna-san, you are so amazing. I can't believe you thought so much in such short time."

Shirasaka Hazumi praised Luna with an adorable expression like an reincarnated angel. One would presume that her only thoughts were of the safety of their companions.

Luna chuckled and smiled at the middle school girl who was her opposite.

"In any case, let's get in touch with SAURU's Kantou branch first, as well as Tokyo New Town's government departments and the Ministry of Defense."

"Yes!"

"May I request you two to help?"

Luna winked at the two other high school girls.

They were Mutou-san and Funaki-san, Haruga Haruomi's classmates and members of the UFO Research Club. During the fight against Pavel Galad, they had been a lot of help.

"I will add hazard pay and special compensation on top of your official wages."

"Really!? Ahaha, rich people really are quite something."

"Oh well, I'm guessing the evacuation shelters won't be much safer, so I might as well earn some money, of course."

Energetic as always, Funaki-san's eyes glowed with excitement.

Mutou-san was an athletic girl with an androgynous short haircut. As usual, her response was based on her traits of rationality and being on top of all the latest gossip.

"By the way, shouldn't we get our club boss over here?"

"Oh—right. President M said she was going to stay at school, waiting for us, instead of evacuating."

"You're referring to the most mysterious woman in the world, right?"

Luna Francois had heard a little about her too.

President M, an eccentric who possessed superpowers completely different from those of witches and magical races. Her presence would definitely be more calming.

"Leave the front line to Harry and company. Let us work behind the scenes to do more preparations. This will be busy."

"Hmm."

Red Hannibal looked up at the moon in the night sky and muttered quietly.

He was currently in human form, a brawny man dressed in a red coat. He was standing alone on the roof of the Empire State Building, one of Old New York's landmarks.

"The other side is making a move at last, huh?"

The human Hannibal grinned.

It was supposed to be noon in Tokyo, but late night in New York. Due to the thirteen-hour time difference between the two, a clear bright moon was hanging high in the night sky.

It was not yet a full moon, which would probably arrive in two or three days.

The moon and its surroundings would be considered a special place for dragonkind.

The random attacks against the Earth's surface by small dragons, Raptors, were known as "dragon strikes." Raptors mostly began their journey from either the Moon's surface or their lair on satellite orbit, then broke through the atmosphere with their own strength, venting their urge for destruction on the cities of the human world...

"Very well. The princess should be capable enough to prevent him—that Tyrannos brat who demanded to strike a deal with me—from getting his way..."

Smiling, Hannibal imagined how the young lad and lass would end up.

Hannibal had lived eons as a dragon king. Whether the Tyrannos or Princess Yukikaze, both were akin to newborn little snakes to him.

How much could they achieve?

With great anticipation, Hannibal watched the night sky.

"O dragonslaying spear, for now, let us bide our time together for the opportunity to arrive."

In addition to the bright moon, there were countless stars in the night sky.

Among them was the seal symbolizing the Rune of the Spear, the tail portion of the constellation known to Earthlings as Ursa Minor.

A long tail with a stationary star at its tip.

Mankind called it the North Star. Dragonkind called it the royal star. Ursa Minor's tail was the "spear shaft" while the North Star was the "spear tip."

"So be it, if the princess defeats the brat. Conversely—suppose he were to demonstrate the ability to subdue the princess... I shall seriously consider making a deal with him."

The strongest dragon king calmly muttered to himself.



## Part 3

"Although Princess Yukikaze proudly declared she would lead us to her domain, the buildings and rooms here are so desolate."

Orihime seemed a bit disappointed.

"As one would expect, these are ancient runes constructed by the dragons, right?"

Hearing Asya's comment, Hal also voiced his opinion. "Really? I doubt they'd construct buildings with staircases. Perhaps these were left behind by an ancient alien civilization on the Moon?"

"Aliens? I've heard of them. They look similar to an octopus, right?"

"Unfortunately, that's a Martian."

"And the H. G. Wells version to boot. Like *War of the Worlds*'."

Hal and Asya spontaneously shared in a joke.

Princess Yukikaze brought the group to a corner in her "castle."

There were twenty or thirty towers resembling square buildings, standing randomly on a lunar plain. Hal and company were currently inside one of these towers. Built completely from stone, they were a gloomy white in color.

This tower was four stories tall. Hal and company were on the top floor.

Judging from the use of stairs to move between floors, the building structure quite resembled architecture on Earth. However, there was no partitioning within individual floors. Each entire floor was a single room. Very plain.

Hal, Asya and Orihime, the three Earthlings, were gathered here.

After bringing them to the Moon, Princess Yukikaze said "make

yourselves comfortable wherever you like" and flew away.

The trio had no choice but to find a random tower to serve as their temporary accommodations.

"If I were to critique from a science fiction angle," Asya wagged her finger and observed, "This is clearly a mysterious historical site on the surface of the Moon, yet you can breathe normally inside, experiencing gravity identical to the Earth's, how implausible... Terraforming here must have taken place on an absurd scale."

"I gave up on critiques back when I visited the Dragon Palace at the bottom of the sea."

"Now that you mention it, there was no consideration for water pressure or being in the sea. Everything was handled with 'magic takes care of everything because this place is related to dragonkind'."

"May I ask a question, Asya-san? What was that terra- something you just mentioned?"

"Terraforming. It's a word invented by science fiction writers in the past, basically modifying another planet's environment to become more like Earth's."

"Insistence on this issue is an indicator of science fiction mania."

"Yes indeed. Like a loyalty test, even if you don't go to the summer and winter comikets, you have to attend the annual SF Convention."

"By the way, a recent Japanese anime used Mars as a setting, but unbelievably, the gravity was identical to Earth's. They must have erred on purpose."

"Not surprising. No matter how much detailed research or fact checking you put into it, you're not going to be pleasing modern audiences much. I would've done the same."

"Sorry, you two are delving into a world unfamiliar to me."

The trio chatting looked like it could have been a scene on Earth.



However, if one were to lean out of a window, where there was no glass, and look up at the sky—

"Hmm—The Earth is blue as ever."

"We have absolutely nothing to do here. No giant step for mankind, that's for sure."

"I never thought I'd have a chance to leave Earth."

Following Hal, Asya and Orihime came to the window.

Over the trio's heads was a sky filled with stars.

There was no air on the Moon, hence, nothing to scatter sunlight to make the sky look blue. The view overhead was a jet-black sky filled with stars.

Mankind's cradle, the blue Earth looked about the size of a basketball.

Blue oceans covering 70% of the Earth's surface, white clouds, greenery and the earthen color of land stood in stark contrast to one another. But this was also a view that felt surreal.

"Is it because I'm witnessing this without going through astronaut training like certain brothers?" Wondered Hal in a tone that even he himself found unmotivated. "What a pity that I don't feel touched."

"I guess it's the same principle as 'catching your own fish tastes better'," answered Asya poignantly. "But Haruomi, since dragonkind's return around 2000, the Moon and the satellite orbits have essentially been their territory. I heard there are many Raptor lairs in that zone, but monitoring work hasn't progressed very much. Perhaps we could earn some pocket money by making detail records of the situation here."

"Oh—NASA or JAXA might be willing to buy information from us, right?"

"More importantly, Asya-san, now that Princess Yukikaze has left, it's about time you tell us in detail what happened."

Hal and Asya were going off on a tangent about economics completely removed from the dreams of space, Orihime clapped her hands once.

"When exactly did you learn to use the Rune of the Chain?"

"Yes—as I mentioned earlier, I simply stole a flint from Pavel Galad's stockpile and drew out the Rune of the Chain. In the process, I did cheat a little, asking that rumored person to give me a hand."

"That rumored person—You mean Sophocles?"

"Yes. Just as I had heard, he's an extremely suspicious man. I can't believe he came all the way into the barrier... Anyway, that's what happened."

Asya extended her hands.

Proof of her identity as Hal's vassal, the Rune of the Bow, originally imprinted on the back of her left hand, but had disappeared without a trace now. Replacing it was the new rune in the center of her right palm.

The magical symbol resembling the "ㄆ" character—

This was the Rune of the Chain that they had seen during the summer holiday excursion.

"I am now the successor to this rune."

Even Hal's childhood friend, whom he had known for more than ten years, had inherited a dragonslaying rune. Hal was planning to complain about this, but swallowed his words before he could speak.

In truth, he had been using multiple spells of investigative magic while they were chatting.

One spell had provided intriguing information.

"What is this?"

"Haruga-kun, what's the matter?"

"Nothing really. I used runes of Ruruk Soun to create an Eye to observe this historical site and the surrounding geography. By the way, expressed in lunar landscape terms, our location is the northeastern part of 'Sea of Showers' in the northern hemisphere."

"Huh? We're in a sea!?"

"So-called seas on the Moon are *areas whose surfaces are covered by dark basalt*. When viewing the Moon from the Earth, these areas look black." Hal explained to the surprised Orihime.

"Why don't you try using visualization magic too? We're currently on the Moon's surface. From a bird's eye view, you can clearly see famous lunar features like the Sea of Tranquility and the Aristoteles crater. Moreover, something unusual is happening in this historical site's vicinity."

"On the Moon's surface?"

Just as Hal nodded in response to Asya question...

The wand he had been holding in his right hand the whole time, the magic gun, said quietly, "Hey brat."

Hard, cold, heavy, the touch of steel. Apart from the soul residing in this magic vessel, no one else on Earth would address Haruga Haruomi as "brat."

Using Hinokagutsuchi's child-like voice, the magic gun spoke haughtily, "I know not whether this could move you, but should you desire to see something interesting, why not investigate that anomaly in detail?"

"What do you mean?"

Intriguing words, but—

Hal jumped in surprise just as he was about to lean forward. The building they were inside was shaking violently.

Next to the window, Hal hastily poked his head out. Then he understood.

A dragon king's gigantic body whooshed past the sky above. Ten-odd meters in length, it was a white dragon with massive wings outspread.

The white dragon king, Princess Yukikaze.

This was the lively young beauty's dragon form.

'Haruomi, I, Yukikaze, must speak with you! Come out!'

The huge voice came from the sky.

Booming like thunder, nevertheless, it was clearly the princess' adorable voice.

The dragon king flew past in the sky over the tower containing Hal and company, then slowly flew back.

Her flying was quite vigorous, worthy of a king's.

Deciding that pretending to be absent would be highly unlikely to work, Hal grumbled.

"And collecting information is so important too."

These were his honest thoughts as a treasure hunter, not a warrior.

If possible, he wanted to rush over to "a certain scene" as quickly as possible. If he were to answer the dragon king's summon, the anomaly could end in the meantime.

"So, Juujouji, I've got a favor to ask of you."

"Eh? Me?"

Orihime stared wide-eyed. A white furry fox-wolf was lying prone on the ground behind her.

As big as a thoroughbred horse, with nine tails to boot—Akuro-Ou shrunk down to minimum size. In case of emergencies, Orihime had summoned her ahead of time.

As expected of a leviathan whose appearance resembled a canid fox,

Akuro-Ou not only had a sharp nose but also sensitive hearing.

"Crouching" on the stone floor, she stared at the ceiling—towards the sky—growling in a warning voice.



## Part 4

"Haruomi, do you find my celestial palace comfortable?"

"Although the scenery is even more desolate than the desert planet where Luke Skywalker grew up, I guess it isn't exactly uncomfortable." Complaining surreptitiously about his accommodations, Hal asked, "What was it you must speak to me about?"

"Fufufufu. What are your thoughts on how I look—this magnificent form—to you?"

Princess Yukikaze's answer was unexpected.

They were located at a plaza in the heart of the neighborhood where dozens of stone towers stood. Hal and Asya had just sprinted here with Asya. The two of them were panting heavily.

Fierce and stately, Princess Yukikaze looked at the two humans below.

Her form as a dragon measured ten-odd meters in length.

The white dragon king had landed in front of them in this manner.

"Even if you ask for our opinion... All I can reply is 'so big,' okay?"

The sudden question left Asya confused, who cocked her head and said, "But maybe Hannibal has a slight upper hand in physique and impressiveness, if I remember right."

"You didn't remember wrong. Hannibal is definitely two sizes bigger than her."

Despite the dragon king's powerful body in front of their eyes, the two of them still discussed calmly.

This was a far cry from long ago when the sight of an elite dragon—Raak Al Soth—would scare them stiff. For better or worse, they were

used to it.

Facing these two rude humans, Princess Yukikaze seemed quite offended.

"Tyrannos lass, I did not ask you. Speaking of which, I, Yukikaze, summoned only Haruomi alone."

She was grumbling quietly in a fuming voice.

Nevertheless, even one sentence such as this, when uttered from a dragon king's mouth, would resound all around, shaking the atmosphere like distant thunder.

Even so, Asya remained unafraid despite being a new Tyrannos. Impressive as ever, Asya.

"What does it matter? Haruomi and I have declared war on you."

"Tsk. No matter. In any case, Haruomi, I, Yukikaze, would like you to take a careful look at my majestic appearance."

"Why? I knew long ago how powerful you are."

"Nothing much, because I am unsure whether I will be able to transform next time, when I duel you."

"What do you mean?"

The unexpected answer made Hal jump. The princess proceeded to tell him, "Fufufu. Apparently due to my young age, I cannot successfully take dragon form every time unless I am sufficiently excited."

"I see..."

Princess Yukikaze was probably a human who had turned into a dragon king—It appears that Hal's earlier guess was correct.

Hal nodded vigorously. The princess continued, "However, I am in excellent shape today, possibly because I invited you here. My transformation succeeded straight away. Hence, this is my reward for



you."

"Meaning?"

"Fufufufu. I, Yukikaze, allow you to admire my magnificent form as a dragon. Let the sight of my powerful body burn onto your retinas."

"This is more like mental torture than a reward..."

Princess Yukikaze's unconventional thought process compelled Hal to grumble. The thought of "praising the powerful body of an imminent enemy's" was something a muscle fetishist might have, but not a nerd like Hal.

However.

Observing the princess' dragon form at such close range, Hal could not help but exclaim.

"Well, you look very awesome right now, or maybe pretty is the word. From that perspective, I guess it could be considered a reward."

"Pretty?"

"Yeah. Hannibal is definitely bigger and looks stronger too. But you, Princess Yukikaze, definitely look prettier. White and slender, you resemble those humanoid weapons drawn by a certain designer and manga artist whose settings tend to be overly surreal."

"Haruomi, are you referring to those M●rtar whatevers that were later renamed into Goth●c something or others?"

"Yes, that's right. The designs are a bit similar. My boyish mind is strangely excited by this."

"...What on earth are you talking about?"

Hal accidentally started chatting with Asya about a topic only comprehensible to the two of them, causing Princess Yukikaze to glare coldly. He hastily put on a smile to appease the princess.

"Simply stated, your dragon form is very wonderful, yeah."

Hal's praise was quite clear.

However, the princess simply scoffed and ignored him, remaining in her dragon form. Evidently, she valued power and ferocity far more than intangible beauty.

(Is she an elementary schoolboy?)

(I got it. She's the type that would find space-age humanoid military mecha cooler the more feathers it has on its back, like the Str●ke Freedom.)

(Personally, I also like those that attack with maces or wrenches.)

While whispering to Asya, Hal pondered.

Bringing his childhood friend along was for the purpose of drawing the white dragon king's attention together. Meanwhile, their companion was supposed to be using this time to investigate "a certain lunar anomaly."

With the duel against Princess Yukikaze so imminent, perhaps this was pointless curiosity.

However, the lazy self-styled devil had unexpectedly given Hal a push.

What exactly was the meaning in her words? Hal thought silently, hoping to hear Orihime's report as soon as possible.

"U-Umm, Kagutsuchi-san? Will Akuro-Ou really be alright?" asked Orihime apprehensively.

She was outside the tower that served as their temporary lodgings. Ahead of them was the northeastern sky where her partner Akuro-Ou had flown.

"Even if Akuro-Ou is a leviathan, she is still a creature of flesh and blood after all. Would it be too much to have her fly outside without any equipment..."

"Too much? Nonsense," coldly replied the magic gun that Haruga

Haruomi had entrusted to her. "There is nothing to fear from even the void of the sea of stars as long as you have imperishable protection. Furthermore, are you aware that the territory under your feet is this safe only because of Yukikaze's protection?"

"I-I know very well..."

The white dragon king's territory. A mysterious historical site on the Moon.

In truth, this area was secured to an air-tight degree, by a pearly dome-shaped barrier—imperishable protection.

Outside of the protection lay an endless desolate scenery of white sand and rocks.

The exterior was a zone affected by *a variety of problems encountered only outside of Earth* such as vacuum, low gravity, low temperature, ultraviolet light, radiation, space dust, etc.

It was not a place where Earth creatures could venture in the flesh.

However, Akuro-Ou was a "serpent"—a leviathan.

Orihime was wearing just a school uniform against the Moon's harsh environment.

It was truly surreal. Orihime sighed and shook her head. *I have to focus and change my mindset.*

"Very well, seeing as I've ventured into the bottom of the sea and alternate dimensions, what is there to fear from the Moon now..."

Telling herself this, Orihime pictured the white fox-wolf in her mind.

Akuro-Ou was heading somewhere on her own. Orihime began to link her partner's soul with her own to enable remote control.

"Akuro-Ou, respond to me!"

The instant Orihime prayed, their souls were successfully linked.

Her soul left her body and flew as though swimming in the sea to Akuro-Ou, who was hovering over the Moon's surface.

They were on the Moon's northern hemisphere, flying in the vicinity of the north pole.

Their location just now was the Sea of Showers on the Moon.

Nearby were the Sea of Serenity, the Sea of Tranquility, Montes Appeninus and Montes Archimedes, etc. As for Orihime and Akuro-Ou's destination—

"Akuro-Ou, that place is apparently called the Plato crater."

This was the biggest crater on the Moon.

It was relatively close to the Sea of Showers, but in more concrete terms, it was about several hundred kilometers away.

"Let's accelerate using magic!"

The white nine-tailed fox-wolf obeyed Orihime's command and invoked the pseudo-divinity of the Sun.

This was the ability that Orihime had obtained through her power up several hours prior. After spending forty or fifty seconds to charge up, Akuro-Ou started to move at the same speed as sunlight.

Whoosh—They swiftly arrived on top of the gigantic crater.

Practically instantaneous movement.

They were currently a thousand meters or so above the Moon's surface. Under Akuro-Ou was a majestic lunar feature resembling a gaping mouth, the Plato crater, with a diameter of a hundred kilometers and an average depth of a kilometer or so.

"Oh my?"

In spirit form, Orihime drew closer to her partner.

Casting Enhanced Vision on herself, she saw an astonishing sight the

instant she activated magical sight.

"Something... is emerging from the Moon!?"

Despite distortions, the Plato crater was essentially round.

Many spheres resembling gas or soap bubbles were emerging like mad from the center of the hundred kilometer long diameter.

"Th-There must be hundreds here..."

A casual glance revealed over three hundred spheres.

The spheres were all transparent and colorless, glinting iridescent like soap bubbles. However, their surface seemed hard, resembling crystals a little.

"Is this what you wanted us to see, Kagutsuchi-san!?" Orihime cried out to the accompanying Hinokagutsuchi who resided in the magic gun. "What on earth is—"

"Hmph. Confirm with your own eyes now that you are already here."

"I-I suppose you are right. Akuro-Ou, get closer!"

Hinokagutsuchi sounded a little impatient. Orihime nodded in agreement and ordered Akuro-Ou to speed up immediately.

The white nine-tailed fox-wolf swiftly descended. Even if they were not on the Moon, only spiritual entities would be capable of flying at such high speeds.

Thanks to that, Orihime was able to witness a shocking scene soon after.

"Aren't these Raptors!?"

Sleeping inside each sphere was a Raptor.

There were slight variations in body size, ranging from seven to eight meters in length. These were the small dragons called "winged lizards" by the elites.

They lacked forelimbs for grasping objects and the ability to speak or use magic.

The three hundred or so spheres were hovering inside the Plato crater, with dormant dragons hidden in them.

"Oh my? They... seem smaller than usual."

Orihime nodded. There was no mistake.

The Raptors sleeping in the spheres were half as big as usual.

Furthermore, their color was different, not the steel gray Raptors usually seen. The small Raptors on the Moon were clearly lighter in color.

Upon closer examination, even their facial features were less sharp...

"They seem to be juveniles?"

Orihime commented based on intuition, then a thought came to her.

Hundreds of crystalline spheres with young Raptors sleeping inside them. They were like the eggs of amphibians, insects or reptiles...

"....."

She focused her senses as a witch.

Don't think, feel. This was the *trick to magic* that Asya had taught her before. The wise words of a great martial arts master. Orihime followed Asya's advice and felt the flow of magic that filled the entire crater. Below—

What Orihime focused her attention to was not the hundreds of "eggs" hovering throughout the air, but below—the Moon's surface.

She concentrated, squeezing out the necessary power.

Magical power whooshed out, causing Orihime's senses to become even sharper. As a result, she saw the gigantic rune near the center of the crater.

It was an infinity sign.

"I've seen this design before..."

In fact, this was a very familiar symbol for witches like Orihime.

When summoning a leviathan, a pentagram magic circle would first appear in the sky. Then the pentagram, signifying evil exorcism, would immediately transform into an infinity sign.

"Please do not compare this with the *imitation* you humans use. For dragonkind, this is the one and only source of life, the Rune of the Mother Dragon."

However, the former dragon king residing in the magic gun, Hinokagutsuchi, spoke softly as though mocking her idea.

The Rune—of the Mother Dragon.

The instant Orihime's heart was shaken by these words, the situation changed.

Every "egg" started to crack all at once.

The small Raptors sleeping in them hastily opened their eyes, spread their wings and flew unsteadily.

Some flew off to elsewhere on the Moon while others headed to the Earth.

There were also a few Raptors going off in completely different directions. Furthermore, some of the small Raptors immediately formed flocks.

"Are you stunned? Priestess, this is birth for dragonkind."

"Kagutsuchi-san!?"

Orihime looked to the side, only to see that Hinokagutsuchi had manifested in the air at some point in earlier.

It had been a long time since the young girl dressed in a red kimono

left the magic gun.

"There are no so-called women among pure-blooded dragons, no females. What gives birth to them is the land itself, with the Rune of the Mother Dragon carved upon it."

"I see now..."

The Crimson Queen of the past then said to the astonished Orihime, "Most of the newborn winged lizards will encounter death somewhere. But over decades and centuries, individuals might accumulate enough wisdom and magical power, suddenly awakening into elites. Disregarding hybrids such as Hannibal, this would be the likely origin of Pavel Galad."

"A rune giving birth to pure-blooded dragons...!"

The polar opposite of dragonslaying runes.

The secrets of life were truly too profound. Having witnessed this scene with her own eyes, Orihime was stunned speechless.





# **Chapter 2 - The Rune of the Mother Dragon**

# Part 1

The temporary lodgings for Hal and company—A historical site on the Moon.

The "front side" from the Earth's perspective.

The Moon's rotational period and orbital period were both roughly twenty-seven days. As a result, the Moon always presented the same face to the Earth.

The back side, normally unseen, was pockmarked and very ugly.

The front side, always facing the Earth, glowed white with a tranquil sense of beauty.

A rotational period of roughly twenty-seven days meant that daytime persisted for fourteen days on the. Similarly, nighttime also lasted fourteen days.

Roughly twelve hours had passed since Hal was taken to the lunar historical site.

It was daytime throughout this duration.

Hal and his companions spent the night at the tower they had chosen randomly. Hal was to alone on the top floor while the two other girls used the area downstairs.

At the moment, Hal was taking a stroll alone in the historical site.

He was walking like normal, unaffected by the weightlessness in space or the Moon's gravity that was one-sixth of the Earth's. What a place far removed from common sense.

"A rune that gives birth to all pure-blooded dragons, huh..." Hal muttered to himself.

The dragon birth ritual conducted in the Plato crater on the Moon. Seeing it in progress with an eye of magic, Hal had also sent Akuro-

Ou to investigate.

From what was reported back, it was a magic symbol in the form of an infinity sign that gave birth to countless Raptors.

"Right, I had asked Hinokagutsuchi before how dragons were born. Back then, she cackled at me and avoided giving a straight answer."

Did they lay eggs or give birth to live young? Speaking of which, was there a distinction between male and female?

Hal had asked what would be fundamental for any species, but Hinokagutsuchi glossed over the issue, deeming it "too complicated" and that he would understand eventually, so the matter ended up dangling unresolved all this time.

Back then, he had just gotten to know the self-styled devil.

But this time, Hinokagutsuchi mentioned a term.

The Rune of the Mother Dragon—

"She's finally doing things different from her usual style."

The former dragon queen was providing information, a rare act indeed.

Hal was quite intrigued by her intentions. Furthermore, he also wanted to investigate that "Rune of the Mother Dragon"...

"Hmm?"

He was suddenly jolted out of this thoughts.

The Rune of the Bow in the center of his right palm was telling him that his complementary rune was approaching.

"Haruomi, lend me a moment of your time!"

"You! I knew it."

Princess Yukikaze had flown in from the sky above.

Riding her magic wand, the surfboard, she arrived like the wind.

By the time Hal noticed, she had already caught him by the back of the collar, forcibly dragging him onto her surfboard.

Princess Yukikaze, dressed in a one-piece dress, was right beside him. In other words, they would be considered riding together.

"Woah!"

Hal immediately fell flat on his bottom against the surfboard.

He did not think his sense of balance was good enough to stand properly on this unstable means of locomotion.

"Hahahaha, how unsightly!"

"What choice do I have!? This obviously isn't meant for two riders!"

The princess' laughter was so lively that Hal could not sense any intention of mockery from her. Hal grumbled in response.

The magic surfboard swiftly ascended vertically, easily overcoming the Moon's gravity—exceeding Mach 8 in speed.

Underfoot, the white moon gradually receded.

Kept out of harm's way by imperishable protection, the princess and Hal did not feel any burden, but...

"Where the heck are you taking me!?"

"I have something to discuss, so accompany me for a while. I shall show you my residence!"

"Ehhh!?"

Their altitude was probably over a hundred kilometers.

Hal and the princess were headed towards an asteroid. Orbiting the Moon, it resembled an oval disc, large enough to place the entire Old Tokyo Dome.

Princess Yukikaze seemed to be his fated rival.

Including today, only two days remained for his recuperation before his duel with this girl—

Once he could catch his breath, Hal's first words were a complaint.

"There's no need to go all the way to this kind of place, if all you want is to talk to me."

"It is quieter here and the view more beautiful than below. I like it here."

There were ruins on this asteroid too, filled with plain stone towers.

But different from the Moon, there was also an elegant building here.

It was a castle built with a transparent material with a faint blue tint—ice. Its roof was sharp like an ice pillar, tapering off like a cone.

The silhouette of the "ice tower" was reminiscent of a delicate ice sculpture.

The castle featured a great hall that seemed to be for receiving audiences. In this place where the floor, the walls and pillars were all transparent as ice, Hal faced Princess Yukikaze.

"Then why not bring us here from the beginning?"

"Ridiculous. As the saying goes, boys and girls must not sit together after the age of seven. Even if it is you, Haruomi, since you are a man, how could you possibly live under the same roof as me?"

"But you clearly left me together with Juujouji and Asya..."

"?"

Princess Yukikaze blinked.

She apparently could not comprehend the meaning of Hal's words.

Princess Yukikaze looked like she regarded the Japanese girl and the

master-class witch, who was also a Tyrannos like him, as "cats kept by Haruga Haruomi." She probably did not see those two as individual persons.

Just as Hal felt stunned, thinking "nothing less expected from a dragon king"—

"Allow me to have a look at your face."

The princess suddenly closed in face to face.

Hal's height was almost 170 cm, definitely not considered tall. Even so, he was still taller than the princess, who stood roughly 150 cm tall. The white dragon king even stood on tiptoe.

"The color in your complexion has improved. It appears that you have listened to me and rested obediently indeed."

"All thanks to you."

"Praiseworthy, Haruomi. Keep this up in preparation for the day of the duel."

Princess Yukikaze nodded happily.

The princess' face was right before his eyes. Though her age was estimated to have surpassed a thousand, her facial features remained child-like.

Hal felt a vigorous beat of his heart.

So near. Their noses were almost about to touch. This distance was like that time with Juujouji Orihime.

Badump badump. His heart raced faster. By the way, Princess Yukikaze was truly adorable.

(Just like her name, she's really like a snow fairy.)

An uncharacteristically romantic comment rose up in Hal's mind.

He did not harbor the slightest impure thought towards the beautiful

maiden of a dragon king. However, this excessively cute member of the opposite sex had suddenly drew so near to him, despite being a member of dragonkind.

This was the reason why his heart raced.

(Crap. How should I put this...? I already have Juujouji, I can't feel something for another person—)

Hal tensed his face and deliberately feigned an unfazed attitude.

"Oh?"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Haruomi, I did not know you could make such a manly expression."

"Of course, I am a man after all."

"Well said. Fufufufu. To think an anomalous Tyrannos like you would possess manly mettle, I am quite surprised—and pleased."

"Wonderful. In fact, a gentleman's pride is one of the things I brag about."

Juujouji Orihime had seen through it in an instant.

The fact that Haruga Haruomi's facial expression would tense up particularly whenever he entertained lecherous thoughts.

However, in certain ways, Princess Yukikaze was even more innocent than the Japanese witch.

Hearing Hal's answer, the princess partially closed her eyes with satisfaction.

"Is that so? Then keep up your efforts, because it is your duty to maintain the image that I prefer."

"Eh? Why is that?"

"Did you forget the promise!?"



Hal widened his eyes. Princess Yukikaze pouted.

Even though she was pouting childishly, it only felt like another charming side to her. Beautiful maidens were truly in a class of their own.

"Did I make some kind of promise to obey you?"

"Indeed. It was that night when we first clashed as the successors to the Bow and the Arrow, I must have told you—"

"Oh that time before the summer vacation. Genbu-Ou was part of it too."

His first battle against Princess Yukikaze was almost three months ago.

That time, Hal had defeated Genbu-Ou, a gigantic minion with a length exceeding a hundred meters. True Genbu-Ou, wielding a goddess' power, had emerged from the gigantic turtle, plunging Hal into a difficult fight...

Hal suddenly remembered.

That night, Princess Yukikaze had rushed over to tell him:

'Haruomi, ours is a relationship where a decisive duel between us is inevitable. If I defeat you and you're fortunate enough to survive—'

'You can become my minion.'

'If you turn out to be a warrior capable of surviving an encounter against me on the battlefield... A reward of this level would be richly deserved. Do your best, Haruomi!'

Indeed. Like a demon king who would tell the protagonist to "join my side" before the final battle, Princess Yukikaze had issued a one-sided declaration to him.

"Do you remember now?"

Princess Yukikaze grinned.

"Naturally, the necessary condition is that you survive instead of dying after the duel... You are the man who bears the fate of becoming my servant. In that case, becoming the type the master prefers—"

"Is my obligation—So that's what you mean?"

"Precisely."

"That doesn't really count as a promise to me."

"What did you say!?"

"Because you left without waiting for my answer."

"Grr."

"Well, it's true that it's a pretty good deal, offering me my life in exchange for my allegiance, but I've got my pride too. Wagging my tail and agreeing to someone's one-sided offer, that'd wrong for a man, right?"

As for his honest thoughts...

Of course, becoming the beautiful dragon king's slave would be a thousand times better than getting killed. He definitely hoped the princess would hire him. Hal valued his own life more than dying for pride, but if he were to confess truthfully—

Princess Yukikaze would probably scold him "No manliness at all!"

It would be scary too if Princess Yukikaze said "I changed my mind" when he actually lost, hence Hal intentionally went contrarian. By creating the best impression possible for the princess in preparation for his *moment of defeat*—That was the gist of his calculations.

(Well, I don't think she's the type to get angry just because I talk back to her.)

Since he understood the princess' personality, he boldly said, "Besides, it's a bit much to make a promise before he duel with the assumption that I'd lose. What if you happen to lose... What do I get

from you?"

"I, Princess Yukikaze, would lose to you, a mere Tyrannos?"

"Yeah."

Princess Yukikaze glared at him, causing Hal to secretly break out in cold sweat.

She was not genuinely angry. The princess' slightly displeased eyes made Hal a bit scared, but he decided to feign courage as much as possible and chose his words carefully.

"Because it's a match, right? An unexpected situation might arise, no —"

Hal declared assertively.

"I will definitely make it happen."

The usual Haruga Haruomi would not have been able to speak like this.

Perhaps it was because these lines were completely contrary to his usual self. The assertive words easily rolled off his tongue. Since he was merely taking his usual self and acting in an opposite manner, he was able to instantly come up with he needed to say.

(I guess this is what actors feel when they ad-lib on stage.)

What a frivolous self production.

As for the response from Princess Yukikaze, who belonged to a race of natural born warriors—

"Well then, Haruomi, the day that I, Yukikaze, loses to you shall be the day when I become your minion!"

Like a noble warrior, she declared gallantly.

Sure enough, the princess was still too young. Her naivete was a bit adorable.

"Got it. But personally, I'm a bit put off by the idea of taking in minions, so I won't collect on the deal if I win."

Hal had no wish to force a small girl to become his servant or slave.

Spurred by morals and a conscience, Hal offered the princess a slightly hypocritical answer... Although the main reason was because he could not imagine the situation after the duel with the princess at all.

However, the seasoned warrior who had lived over a thousand years did not seem quite impressed with Hal's conservative response.

"What lax conditions. Are you trying to offer charity to me, Yukikaze?"

Hal hastily explained himself to Princess Yukikaze, who had stiffened her expression.

"Th-That's not what I mean."

"Hmph. Accepting generosity from a mere Tyrannos would only humiliate me. In the event that I, Yukikaze, were to lose—Go ahead and treat me as your possession, do not hold back!"

"Huh—!?"

"Naturally, there is no reason for me to lose to a brat like you!"

The angry dragon king maiden asserted sternly.

Hal anxiously wondered "did I go too far?" but immediately changed his mind.

Whether or not this conversation had taken place, Princess Yukikaze was not going to go easy on him. Doing this was not going to make things any worse for Hal.

Princess Yukikaze's personality was straight as an arrow.

Rather, the problem was—

(Although I made a cool speech just now, my chances of winning are minuscule no matter how I think about them.)

That being said, that was no excuse for sloppy battle preparations. It was time to discuss *that* with her—Hal changed the subject.

"Say... Isn't there a certain crater on the Moon with a huge rune of Ruruk Soun is carved on it?"

"Oh?"

Princess Yukikaze, who looked like an angry sulking child just a moment ago, changed her expression instantly.

With a profound and knowing smile, she gazed upon Hal.

"What sharp eyes you have, to think you noticed that already."

"I'm not that amazing. That thing gives off a pretty weird presence and occasionally creates a great many Raptors."

"Fufufufu. That symbol is apparently named the Rune of the Mother Dragon."

Princess Yukikaze replied matter-of-factly.

"The polar opposite to the dragonslaying runes we use, it is a seal for giving birth to dragons."

"How surprising. You seem uninterested in that. Seeing as it's so close to this palace, I would've thought it was yours for sure."

"If one had to attribute ownership, it would belong to all of dragonkind."

The princess spoke in a tone of solemnity, fitting for a dragon king.

"I simply wanted to establish a base near the Moon. Only after settling in this castle did I learn that the Rune of the Mother Dragon had manifested in that location."

"I see..."

After learning the term "Rune of the Mother Dragon," Hal was now able to find information about the birth of dragonkind from his magic wand, the magic gun. In the universe, there was apparently a number of celestial bodies like the Moon, carved with *runes for giving birth to dragons*.

After operating for several centuries, Runes of the Mother Dragon would exhaust their energy and enter dormancy for tens or hundreds of thousands of years.

Once the power of conception recovered, the rune would reappear on the celestial body's surface—

The infinity sign on the Moon had gone through a long period of dormancy before reactivating in July of the year 1999 CE. Indeed, that was the year when the dragons returned to Earth. Dragon kings and elites, who had left Earth or went dormant, became active in concert with the rune's revival...

What a huge inside story. However, this was none of Hal's business right now.

He shrugged and said, "Then it's fine if I go investigate the rune, right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Because it isn't yours, right?"

The princess glared at him, causing Hal's heart to skip a beat. There was intimidating wrath in the girl's eyes.

"Haruomi, do not forget that I, Yukikaze, ordered you to rest properly. It would not do if you delayed your recovery due to unnecessary matters. The days before our duel are running out, you know?"

"That's exactly why I need to go investigate. I might end up finding something—That could come in handy when I'm fighting you."

"What?"

"Rest is the priority but I still want to make a final struggle for the duel."

For the sake of the imminent duel—Hal put these magic words to use.

"Hmm."

Hugging her shoulders, Princess Yukikaze fell into deep thought.

"After all, the Rune of the Mother dragon is merely a symbol for creating dragons and cannot be employed in a battle between a dragon king and a Tyrannos."

The princess sounded like she was criticizing Hal, but did not persist in stopping him.

She respected Hal's opinion. Since the princess had spoken so, the rune probably could not be used as a trump card on the battlefield, but—

Hal had many of his own ideas.

(A dragon king... surely wouldn't think of this.)

He decided to try it out first. The adorable dragon king princess suddenly issued orders.

"Go if you must, but you have to return to me after you finish your business. Should I see any slowing trend in your recovery, I will force you to rest obediently even if I must tie you to a bed!"

She clearly thought of Haruga Haruomi as a pet or a plaything.





## Part 2

"My, aren't you enjoying your chat with Princess Yukikaze?"

"Asya, why are you suddenly saying this?"

"Haruga-kun and the princess sounded so happy when they were chatting. The tone was quite cheerful."

"You too, Juujouji!?"

"It even led to the princess declaring 'I will become yours' to Haruomi... Orihime-san, he's unforgivable, don't you agree?"

"Seriously, it gives me this vibe of 'who does Haruga-san think he is, getting so carried away?'"

"You're head over heels when talking to the princess."

"I-I was desperately handing the princess for the sake of the mission, okay!? Besides, how do you know I was head over heels if all you heard was my voice!?"

"I knew it when I heard a different tone of voice, unlike your usual pretenses."

"Asya-san is correct. Just now, you were acting different from your usual self."

"W-What choice did I have? I was trying my hardest to chat with her, trying my best to divert the princess' attention."

After chatting with the princess for a long time...

Hal bid her goodbye and returned to his companions. He took out the cellphone he had been carrying secretly and used audio recording software to replay his conversation with the princess for the two girls.

After listening, both the childhood friend and Juujouji Orihime

started to reprimand him.

"I can't believe I used my precious battery power to record the conversation. There's no way to recharge cellphones here, you know..."

He had originally hoped to save time on explaining by making a recording, but it turned out to have the opposite effect.

In any case, Hal put his feelings in order and said, "No matter what, the princess agreed, so we can strut about and travel on the Moon. It'd be problem if she dragged me away in the middle of the investigation."

"Going to the princess after investigating, right...?"

"After all, the princess ordered you to return to her..."

"Conversation is over! We don't have much time left. Let's get on with our work."

Further squabbling would affect the mission coming up next.

Hal said to the two girls who had finally settled down.

"Head straight to the crater to investigate that Mother Dragon rune."

The task of climbing the Plato Crater would require Earthlings to prepare an orbiter spacecraft, but Hal was able to skip such a step. He used the Ruruk Soun rune of Teleport.

"We arrived in an instant..."

"Because it's teleportation."

"I can't believe I'd come to somewhere like this by relying on Haruomi's magic... Half a year ago, I never would've thought of this," said Asya poignantly.

Just earlier, Hal and his childhood friend were still in a room inside

the stone tower.

But now, they were standing on a vast land of white. White—dry sand as far as the eye could see. They had finally arrived on the surface of the moon.

"Doraemon's Anywhere Door would definitely be convenient if it actually existed, but the joy of traveling would instantly diminish to zero. Speed and fun are mutually exclusive."

"This time, we're taking the practical route."

The two of them were wearing casual clothes from Earth.

They did not have access to channels for purchasing spacesuits worth over a billion yen apiece. Neither did they need to buy them. Using the power of Tyrannoi, they summoned imperishable protection—A colorless and transparent barrier to cover the body.

This protection normally manifested in the form of a pearly glow, but because Asya commented "I don't care about it during battle, but... The color of our protection gets in the way when we're investigating," so they tried erasing to color.

Although it made for less ambiance, prioritizing practicality was the point here. Hal nodded and took a casual step forward.

"Uwah!"

He was startled. With just a tiny step, his body floated up lightly.

"Even with imperishable protection, we're still not completely free from the effects of low gravity."

"This is a defensive ability to begin with. It's still better than hopping around like astronauts. We simply float a little."

"It's fine as long as you pay attention. But ahead of us..."

After examining the place carefully for a while, Hal and Asya summoned two runes of Ruruk Soun.

This simple arrangement signified "Flight."

Hal levitated into the air. He had never undergone training for moving around on the moon, but with this, he could fly anywhere he wanted. The gravity, one sixth of the Earth's, no longer affected him.

"I see, so you use it this way, huh?"

Murmuring, Asya stared at her right hand.

On her palm was the Rune of the Chain, a symbol similar to the "𐄎" kanji. The master-class witch and native Earthling swung her right hand—

She summoned the same "Flight" runes as Hal.

Whoosh. Asya likewise floated into the air, flying effortlessly next to Hal.

"Impressive as ever, Asya. You're able to use Ruruk Soun magic now."

"I can only use the ones involving a few runes. Unless I get more familiar, I most likely won't be able to use magic that'll be useful on the battlefield."

Once again witnessing how much of a prodigy his childhood friend was, Hal felt quite impressed. However, Asya herself merely shrugged nonchalantly.

"Unlike you, I don't even have a magic wand yet."

"On the other hand, I think you're more amazing for using magic without a wand."

The two of them started moving to their destination using flight magic.

The flying was quite stable. Even if they were holding cups in their hands, the water inside would probably just tremble slightly.

However, they were actually flying at up to four or five hundred kilometers per hour.

After all, too slow a speed would be no good for flying around inside a crater with a diameter of a hundred kilometers. For human standards, this was extremely amazing high-level magic. Without a leviathan's assistance, even master-class witches could not achieve this.

However, Hal said, "From the perspective of dragonkind, this magic is even easier than radio calisthenics... Probably like 'lighting a match.' Thus, I don't think this will accelerate my transformation into a dragon."

Conversely, one could also say—

Haruga Haruomi had already become this close to being a dragon.

Hal deliberately kept this last comment to himself. Asya did not pursue the matter either, probably out of consideration. It was just like in the past when Hal avoided broaching the subject of Rushalka's lifespan running out.

"By the way... Your earlier loss of appetite seems to have recovered. What was the reason after all? You've been acting strange lately."

Hal had not had a chance to spend time alone with his childhood friend for quite a while. The duel against Princess Yukikaze was also coming up soon. Perhaps he should get this cleared up first.

Worried that it might affect his coordination with Asya, he made his decision to ask about *that*.

"Do you remember? Take for example the time when we were alone in that hotel in New York..."

"!?"

Before the battle against Dragon King Hannibal at New York, his childhood friend had kissed him. Furthermore, she had told him something profound. This scene, which had caused Hal much agitation lately, was like a fish bone stuck in his throat.

It caused him to think "Huh? Does Asya actually feel that way about me..."

Hal thought it might be a boy's tendency to consider themselves more attractive than they actually were, common during puberty, but what if it was not the case this time?

When he cautiously asked, his childhood friend reacted emotionally.

"W-What are you talking about, Haruomi!? Recently, my magical power has been in a poor state. There are even times when I don't remember what I've done. Did I do something in front of you!?"

"Eh? Is that what's been happening?"

"That's right! So I'd be very happy if you could be generous and forgive me for my mistakes!"

"I see..."

The one who had acted suspiciously was now very nervous and panicking.

Hal felt it would be bad to pursue the matter any further, so he stopped.

Asya immediately raised another question, "Putting that aside, there's something that bothers me about your dragonification. While I was away, weren't you merging with the Crimson Queen?"

"Don't worry, the others helped cure me."

"That's precisely it. How did they cure a body that had dragonified completely?"

"!?"

Hal's heart instantly went cold.

"Th-They didn't tell you?"

"They didn't. There wasn't enough time last time so I know nothing about the details. Orihime-san did mention to me that Luna and Hazumi-san helped and it apparently took a lot of work."

Apparently, his childhood friend was not aware what Orihime, Luna and Hazumi, the three young maidens in a state of nudity, had done for Hal when he had turned into a red dragon.

"Having become a Tyrannos myself, I'm quite curious."

"Relax. I already know how to cure you if you turn into a dragon in the future."

"W-What do you mean by that!?"

The trigger for Haruga Haruomi's recovery was apparently rooted in lust.

In that case, Asya's was "gluttony" of course. Fully satisfying human desires was the key to avoid dragonification.

Thinking he would explain this later, he told Asya, "I'll explain in detail to you later... Right now, let's prioritize the mission."

Using flight magic, Hal and Asya arrived near the center of the Plato Crater whose diameter was a hundred kilometers.

On the surface of the moon, a couple hundred meters below them was an infinity symbol, roughly five or six kilometers wide and half that in length.

This was apparently the Rune of the Mother Dragon.

Its color was black. On the moon's white surface, it was particularly striking.

However, humans without magical sight could not see it. Were it visible, the observation center on Earth would have discovered it long ago.

In any case, they had flown for roughly ten minutes in total.

The two of them finally arrived just above the edge of the infinity sign.

"This comment is like a very old gag now, but I'm reminded of the

Nazca Lines."

"Indeed. Weren't we seven when we went to look at the Nazca Lines together—Hmm?"

Just as they descended rapidly and were about to land on the surface of the moon...

Hal widened his eyes. To encounter an acquaintance here out of all places. Given that unique manner of dress, Hal could not have recognized the wrong person.

"Uh, fine," Hal muttered in a grumbling voice. "I shouldn't be surprised this guy ran all the way to the moon."

Hadn't he said before?

'So long as it is to see you, Tyrannos and dragon king, I am willing to venture anywhere, not just on Earth but even the far ends of the sea of stars.'

The man who kept his word was named Sophocles.

Too dark a complexion to be Caucasian. Too deep set his facial features to be oriental.

Of indeterminate race, yet he was undoubtedly a handsome man. Like Hal and Asya, the mysterious man was dressed in a manner that completely ignored their environment in space. In his case, he was wearing a black suit under a black coat.

Alone, he was standing on the white moon.





## Part 3

"Long time no see, young man."

The instant Hal and Asya landed, Sophocles greeted them.

His voice was reminiscent of rusted metal.

Still, it was a beautiful voice, deep and magnetic. Combined with his cool and handsome face whose expression barely changed, perhaps he might prove popular with housewives if he were to act in television dramas.

However, this man had sided with dragonkind despite his human identity.

Lowering his voice, Hal said to his childhood friend, "Although I'm in no position to criticize, this is truly a bizarre situation for us to have a normal conversation despite being on the moon."

"Because he's using magic, just like us. Look."

Asya was looking behind Sophocles' back.

Three runes of Ruruk Soun were hovering in the air, signifying "transmit my voice yonder." This magic allowed one to communicate in all conditions.

In fact, the same runes were present behind Hal and Asya too.

After leaving the ruins to visit the true surface of the moon, they had used this magic in order to communicate to each other through the vacuum of space where sound could not travel.

Hal shrugged and responded to the strange man in black.

"You keep showing up after every incident. It really doesn't feel like a long time to me."

"Wonderful. I would like to maintain a long relationship with you, if

possible."

"Hard to say. Despite how I look, I'm someone who could end up dead any moment."

Sophocles calmly spoke to Hal, who was harboring pessimism towards his own future, "Do not put things that way. Even if you have encountered a few problems, you have made astounding growth in a few short months, charging along the road towards dragon kingship. Given your ability, ascending to the throne just like that would also be—"

"Hmm—"

Smiling wryly, Hal looked back Sophocles who was goading him earnestly.

Why? Despite clearly looking like an ascetic with strict self-regulation, Hal always wanted to address him as "the devil" from the first moment he met him.

"I think you were being disingenuous just now."

"Oh?"

"Come on, you've spent thousands, tens of thousands of years observing the Road to Kingship. I'm sure you've noticed long ago, right? I'm actually unsuitable to becoming a dragon king at all."

"Fufufufu, what are you talking about?"

Sophocles seemed to smile.

But his cheek merely twitched a little, so it was hard to be certain if he was actually smiling.

"Without anyone's guidance, you have climbed the dragon king ladder step by step, rely on your own exclusive methods that no one can imitate. How could someone like you be 'unsuitable'?"

"But I don't have any cheating methods available to me anymore."

With a sense of helplessness from having exhausted everything at his disposal, Hal declared lightly.

"My body is probably turning into a dragon soon. But perhaps because I'm lacking in wild instinct or something like that... Once I turn into a dragon completely—turn into an intelligent beast—I might not be able to continue using petty tricks like before."

Yesterday, Hal had turned into a dragon in the middle of his fight with Galad.

Taking on the form of ferocious monster, he had fought the silver dragon—and was easily driven back. Hal completely lacked the wild quality that would have made the difference in that situation.

"A dragon's nature... The qualities of a ferocious wild beast are completely incompatible with the cheap tricks of a lowly commoner like me. I'm civilized to the core. In this sense, Asya over there could very well have more potential to become a dragon king..."

"Hmm. That girl, yes?"

"I met you only yesterday. Thanks for your help."

Asya said she had met this strange man inside Pavel Galad's barrier.

It was soon after she discovered the flint. Apparently, under Sophocles' guidance, his childhood friend had become "dragon king-like" Tyrannos.

Hal asked, "How did he help you?"

"When I was trapped inside Galad's barrier, Sophocles opened a path to the ground surface. That's why I was able to get back to Tokyo so quickly."

It was the moment just before Pavel Galad had survived, turning into a monster to wreak destruction.

Asya and Rushalka had used the Rune of the Chain to deliver the final blow against the silver dragon that was on the verge of death. Had Asya not arrived, Hal did not know if he would still have a

chance to visit the moon.

"Also, I used a trick when inhering the Chain."

"A trick?"

"You know, right? When trying to steal someone's dragonslaying rune, even if the owner is dead, the chance of success is still pretty low."

"Yeah. Hinokagutsuchi said the probability was less than 40%."

"When guy cast a spell to raise the chance to around 70%."

"So that's how you managed to inherit the rune!?"

"Although it boils down to luck in the end, raising the probability from below 40% to more than 70% is quite a lot. It was a huge favor."

"I see."

Pavel Galad had revived himself, going as far as to remodel his body that was supposed to have died.

Hal's childhood friend's cold chain had severed Galad's obsession. Having one question resolved, Hal brought up his next biggest doubt:

"Did he propose some kind of condition in exchange for doing such a big favor for you?"

"Umm... Nothing at all."

Asya stared at Sophocles from the side, totally suspicious of him.

"He said 'With every additional Tyrannos in this era, I become one step closer to my wish.' But we can't have me turning into a dragon too, so I don't really want my power of dragonbane to grow stronger."

"I said this yesterday. That does not matter to me."

Sophocles' tone of voice was quite sincere.

"Holders of dragonslaying runes do not always progress even if they thirst for power. Conversely, there also exist those who become immensely powerful and approach the dragon king throne without any intention of becoming king. This young man is an excellent example. Everything depends on destiny and a person's talent."

" "... "

"Regarding the birth of Tyrannoi, all I have ever done is offer them chances."

Hal and Asya silently stared at Sophocles.

They felt like they could almost see a "devil's tail" behind him, but this strange man remained the same as always, looking so honest, speaking every word from the heart.

Even though his actions always felt like there was some ulterior motive behind them.

"However," Hal switched the subject and spoke to Sophocles.

He wanted to understand more about the true nature of the man who served dragonkind despite his human identity.

"I can't believe you even picked a witch like Asya... the sworn enemy of dragonkind, to become a Tyrannos. Do you have any principles at all? What is your intention?"

"You have misunderstood something," asserted Sophocles calmly.

The man who seemed extraordinary despite the ordinary suit he was wearing remained expressionless.

"For the game revolving around dragon kings and runes of dragonbane... The Road to Kingship, I serve as a facilitator. This does not imply that I am dragonkind's servant at all."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Allow me to rephrase. I am not dragonkind's friend. Rather, it is the opposite. Whether now or in the past, I have always been trying to

help the beautiful planet that nurtured mankind—as well as the humans living upon it."

Sophocles pointed at the brightly shining blue planet in the distance.

Despite being on the moon, his every action was no different from how one would behave on Earth, but Hal and Asya were in no position to criticize others in this regard.

Sure enough, this man possessed extraordinary magical powers as well.

"Haruga Haruomi. I believe our aspirations are the same despite our differences in standpoint."

"Oh my, that can't be possible."

"Please. You and I—We are kindred in a certain sense, you know?"

"How so?"

"For example, I have a rough idea as to why you came over to observe the Rune of the Mother Dragon. On the other hand, dragonkind—especially dragon kings—would find it impossible to comprehend."

"I don't believe you." Hal scoffed at Sophocles. "Or maybe you used magic to read my mind?"

"No, I simply tried to imagine your intent. First of all, to investigate this Rune of the Mother Dragon to see if it could prove useful in the battle against Princess Yukikaze."

"That goes without saying, but anyone can guess this much—"

"Next, I am afraid you intend to *destroy it*."

"....."

"The Rune of the Mother Dragon is clearly a threat to mankind, most probably producing dragon children endlessly. In that case, it is necessary to find out whether it can be destroyed... This is what the

Haruga Haruomi I know would think."

"Uh—"

Seeing his thoughts revealed, Hal was rendered speechless. He licked his lips.

Sophocles was right. If possible, this was something he ought to destroy before the battle against Princess Yukikaze.

Before Haruga Haruomi died, or turned into a dragon completely.

"Whenever you encounter problems, more than coming up with solutions to overcome the predicament at hand, you are more predisposed towards putting large-scale structural reforms into motion, to eliminate the problem itself. Am I correct?"

"I am just... lazy."

Hal finally interrupted Sophocles' long-winded speech.

"It's a lot of work initially, but ultimately, this way of doing things means less hassle after the fact. Anyway, the less effort the better, that's the kind of person I am."

"Indeed. In fact, I am the same."

Sophocles nodded expressionlessly.

"Allow me to offer you some advice as a kindred spirit. The power of dragonbane cannot destroy the Rune of the Mother Dragon. It cannot be destroyed unless you are powerful enough to erase all dragons from the entire universe—a power equal to the god of creation. Nowhere in the universe will you find such an exceptional being."

"H-How did the scale of things suddenly get so big..."

Despite the excessively grandiose warning, Hal still summoned his magic gun to his right hand.

Words alone could be exaggerated to any extent. It could be a bluff. He could not be certain of the truth unless he tested it for himself...



Realizing Hal's intent, Asya exclaimed in alarm, "Haruomi!?"

"Go!"

He aimed the muzzle at the ground and pulled the trigger.

The target was the crater directly below, with the infinity symbol carved upon it. With investigative magic added to the bullets, hal fired three red magic bullets in succession—

Bam bam bam!

The three glowing projectiles struck the white sand definitively, but he did not feel like he had shot anything.

The firepower and magical power were completely nullified. It was like firing bullets at a cosmic abyss, futile.

"Then how about a technique of assured annihilation..."

If he summoned the Crimson Queen and fired the sun-shooting divine bow with maximum firepower—

Thinking that, Hal slumped his shoulders. Trying would be pointless. The investigative magic he had added to the bullets just now had already told him Sophocles was speaking the truth...

This infinity sign was a magic symbol equivalent to the god that had created dragonkind.

Hal dispelled his magic gun and muttered, "Impossible to destroy, huh? Looks like you're right."

"I am pleased that you understand."

"But on behalf of humanity, I'd like to call you out on that 'I am the friend of Earth and mankind' comment. Why would someone with such sentiments go around doing things to help dragon kings and dragon king candidates?"

"Allow me to ask you a question in return—"

Sophocles' tone was sincere as always.

"Do you really believe that we humans can win against dragon kings?"

"Huh?"

"Of course not. In fact, just like you, I... am a man who became a Tyrannos by chance. One day, I suddenly realized: At this rate, our planet and all of humanity would get roped into civil conflict between dragonkind—There is no path but demise."

"....."

"The Road to Kingship is where elites, Tyrannoi and dragon kings fight one another. This game cannot be left unattended. When their conflict and competition intensifies, the world will one day collapse. Such is the astounding competitive instinct and destructive impulse of dragonkind."

The mysterious man's voice remained sincere.

"So long as dragonkind exists, the Road to Kingship needs an administrator to control the game so that it unfolds in mankind's favor. That person needs to serve the dragon kings and Tyrannoi while surreptitiously make sure that competitors from the human side continue to join in."

"Now that you mention that..."

Hal understood and muttered.

"The dragon kings I know... Hannibal, Princess Yukikaze, and the Crimson Queen—they were all hybrids who used to be humans, right?"

"Correct. And of the current dragon kings, both the Black Lightning Emperor and the Blue Sea King are purebloods."

"The number of hybrids... is slightly greater."

"Yes. Would you believe me if I said this was because I brought

dragonslaying runes to Earth?"

Sophocles calmly revealed the truth.

"Human have no means to fight dragons, but it is a different matter for humans who inherit dragonslaying runes to take part in the Road to Kingship. To drive away dragonkind by the hand of these heroes, thus prolonging the lifespan of the human world and the Earth that nurtures humans—That is my wish."

"N-No no. But—"

There was a decisive flaw in what Sophocles said.

Did he not notice it? Or did he not care at all? Feeling he had to make sure, Hal asked in a trembling voice, "Even if you share the dragonslaying runes with humans like this, these humans end up dying in the process or losing their memories as humans, you know? In the end, isn't all you're doing just instigating 'a war between dragon king-class competitors with Earth as the arena'? In that case, the Earth's demise will happen sooner or later..."

"Indeed, that is one viewpoint. I concede that."

The strange man in the black suit nodded unfazed.

No mistake. Hal was sure of it. This man was mad.

"No matter what, in this era when dragonkind has started becoming active in earnest, there is no fate waiting for humanity but demise. However, so long as 'humans capable of killing dragons' are born from the seeds I have sown, humanity's lifespan could extend somewhat."

"Extension of lifespan..."

"Haruga Haruomi. That is precisely what you are doing now."

Hal gasped.

He realized why he thought this man—Sophocles—was the devil.

His actions were definitely not unreasonable. His views had grounds to support them. With this as the starting point, upgrading continually, perhaps one day, humans really could obtain the means to resist dragonkind. However—

Sophocles could no longer do it.

He had become a machine-like being that executed the plan he had devised thousands, tens of thousands of years ago. That was why he resembled the devil.

His mind had most likely died long ago.

Hybrid dragon kings maintained the vitality of their minds by indulging in human feelings and pleasures.

But Sophocles had not done so. He lived this long, most likely only to execute his mission. This was the result.

(Perhaps...)

Hal felt a chill.

(If one seals away the power of dragonbane while in the virtually immortal state of a Tyrannos, to prevent oneself from turning into a dragon... Perhaps this is the outcome.)

As a living thing, humans lived to at most a hundred years or so before dying of old age.

What awaited Hal several thousand, tens of thousands of years later, was perhaps a state akin to insanity like this man's. Moreover...

If Haruga Haruomi were to continue this current state, neither human nor dragon...

Would he eventually get stuck in a dead end like Sophocles?  
Realizing this possibility, Hal shuddered from the bottom of his heart.



## Part 4

"Sophocles-san... He said that!?"

"Yeah. He's even more crazy than we thought."

At the ruins located in the Sea of Showers in the moon's northern hemisphere.

Dozens of stone towers were built here. Juujouji Orihime was on the top floor of one of them, talking to her friend, the senior witch Asya who had just returned from the moon surface.

Also, Haruga Haruomi was not present.

Claiming he had errands to run, he had split up from them.

"Although I cannot fully agree with his views, I have to admit it makes a bit of sense."

"Really? Isn't the world safer with fewer Tyrannoi and dragon kings?"

"Think of it from a different angle. Those who hold dragonslaying runes are essentially enemies to all of dragonkind."

With a knowing look on her face, Asya was the very image of a knowledgeable witch.

"Imagine this. What would happen if a herd of deer were to reproduce on an island without natural predators? The deer will eventually eat all the vegetation on the island, causing a severe ecological imbalance. If dragonkind did the same on Earth—"

"...It will lead to the destruction of Earth's civilization."

"Yeah. And currently the only beasts capable of hunting dragons are the dragon kings and Tyrannoi with their ability to use dragonslaying runes."

"....."

"In that case, why not leave dragon kings and imitation dragon kings alone, and give humans the power of dragonbane, thereby managing the risk. This is Sophocles-san's methodology."

"Oh my? Now that I hear you say this, why does..."

Orihime realized something and tilted her head in puzzlement.

"The goal Haruga-kun and Luna-san said they would achieve through GUILD—"

"Are very similar, right? In this sense, he is quite similar to Haruomi."

"Does that man... want to do something to Haruga-kun?"

"He probably doesn't care what happens to Haruomi, sincerely."

"Eh?"

"It's fine if Haruomi turns into a dragon king. If he ends up dead in a ditch instead of turning into a dragon, then there are no loose ends to tie up, very convenient. I think what he truly doesn't want to see is Haruomi doing nothing, living as a hermit without achieving anything. Because the rare power would become meaningless."

"You are very right."

As expected of the genius witch and combat expert.

Asya's analysis was impressive. Exhibiting excellent powers of observation, the witch and friend tossed a gloomy glance towards Orihime.

"Putting that aside, Orihime-san."

"W-What is the matter? Asya-san?"

Orihime was a little startled.

In fact, she had been feeling "guilty" towards her friend since summer.

Anastasya Rubashvili, the genius witch.

She harbored feelings towards her childhood friend Haruga Haruomi and Juujouji Orihime had noticed faint signs of this. However, so much had happened between him and Orihime this summer, admitting to each other that they were dearest in each other's heart—

And they had kissed many times.

Then there was (Haruga-kun, good grief, always towards my breasts...) and yesterday, even Luna Francois and her cousin Shirasaka Hazumi had joined in, all of them engaging in something absurd together.

Logically speaking, the European-born Asya should not know anything about what had happened, however.

(Has Asya-san finally found out!?)

Unable to speak about it, Orihime had kept Asya in the dark.

Was she going to expose that secret? With somber eyes, Asya opened her mouth solemnly and shook as she yelled!

"We were invited by a dragon king to the moon, don't you think it's weird that there isn't even a banquet? I-I finally regained my appetite and yet I have to sate my hunger on such crude food...!"

"Oh..."

Hearing Asya's heart-rending yell, Orihime nodded.

At this moment, the two of them were sitting at a humble wooden table with a large porcelain dish before them.

This dish was an amazing magic artifact. All one needed to do was concentrate and food similar to white bread would appear on the dish.

Eating this was enough to get a full meal with sufficient nutrients—

That was what Haruga Haruomi had said. He had apparently experienced this inside King Solomon's secret base. There was also a magic pot that produced unlimited distilled water.



However, this magic bread had no flavor.

Even if one focused their sense of taste to the maximum, one could at most taste faint sweetness.

The texture was also dry. For a gourmand who sought pleasure from food, this was desecration of food, absolutely impossible to accept.

As one would expect, Asya began to roar.

"Meals are more than about replenishing nutrients! The true pleasure of eating is about nourishing the soul in addition to the body! Carbohydrates should be obtained from wheat, rice, tubers, legumes except for soybeans, corn, while protein comes from meat and fish, of course! Anyway, meat! Juicy steaks! Fatty premium ribs! Kansai-style sukiyaki made with A5 black Wagyu marbled beef! Deep-fried pork chop cutlets, thick on the inside, crispy on the outside, served as a set meal! Fried chicken that leaves your hands and mouth greasy and sticky! Mince meat cutlets the size of a sandal! Pork belly stew! Genghis Khan grill! Hamburger with fries and shake!"

"L-Let us all go out for dinner once we get back safely!"

The witch companion recited a long list of high-calorie foods.

Silently finding Asya quite adorable, Orihime proceeded to soothe her.

"I could ask my grandfather to take us out to a delicious sushi restaurant."

"Speaking of whitefish, there's sillago, sea bream, halfbeak, and black porgy wrapped in kombu kelp is good too! As for bluebacks, there's horse mackerel, marinated mackerel and spotted shad! Surf clams, egg cockle, orange clam, abalone and conch! Tiger prawns, mantis shrimp, sea urchin, salmon roe, squid, and the chu-toro and o-toro cuts of tuna! Other than nigiri sushi, there's kakiage and bamboo shoots with their own special appeal which are quite nice. To conclude the meal, kanpyo sushi rolls made with egg and eel are a must!"



"Impressive as ever, Asya-san, you are very knowledgeable about sushi too..."

"J-Just a personal hobby... Oh, one more thing, Orihime-san."

Asya seemed to have calmed down.

She lowered her voice and suddenly asked, "How did you help

Haruomi recover when he merged with the Crimson Queen? For some reason, Haruomi won't explain it clearly. When I asked him earlier, he seemed a bit nervous."

"Y-You are asking about this!?"

"Why are you panicking too?"

"It is really nothing special. Nothing worth paying so much attention to—"

"Of course I'm curious as it could very well happen to me tomorrow. Or is there some reason why you can't tell me?"

"Uh, umm, how should I put this—?"

In fact, Orihime had never been this flustered when chatting with female friends.

(I-I was too careless...!)

The silver-haired genius witch looked suspiciously at the flustered Orihime.

Asya's recently emerged feminine charm had vanished as soon as her appetite recovered. Hence, Orihime totally did not expect her to raise this question.

At this rate, she might not be able to keep the secret any longer—

(Haruga-kun, hurry and save me!)

Ultimately, Orihime was just as ill-equipped to deal with romantic rivalry.

She really wished the absent one could return soon. With the two of them together, there might still be a way to keep Asya in the dark...

Orihime desperately cried for help in her thoughts.



## Part 5

"Perhaps you have realized to some extent."

"....."

"Time is nigh. Half a year has elapsed since spring this year. You have spent your days in leisure, however—You will soon reach your limit."

"Yeah."

After returning from investigating the moon and the conversation with Sophocles...

Hal had gone out for a stroll alone.

Leaving the ruins under imperishable protection that were filled with stone towers, he walked about listlessly on the moon.

Protecting Hal was also imperishable protection, adjusted to be colorless.

The only one accompanying him was dead and did not need protection. The young girl dressed in a red kimono, Hinokagutsuchi who had not manifested for a long time, was by his side.

"Brat, even though you narrowly escaped a crisis yesterday... You may not be so fortunate next time. Were you to turn into a dragon again, it might be the end for you in spite of having the devil's own luck."

Hinokagutsuchi's words were scathing as ever.

"Payback is a bitch, so to speak."

"I think the same goes for you."

"Oh?"

"You, the self-styled devil, won't last much longer either, right?"

You've clearly popped up way less recently."

"...Hmph."

The two of them picked a random place to stop.

This former dragon queen and high school boy had met in an alley in Tokyo New Town. After that, days of turbulence had persisted for several months, finally even landing on the moon.

Right now, they were chatting casually—

"Back when I obtained the Crimson Queen, you said 'I might very well vanish if I did not find something to possess'."

Precisely because of that, Hinokagutsuchi had possessed Hal's magic gun.

"Even with a replacement, you are soon reaching your limit, right?"

"Well, this body of mine ought to have exhausted all energy a thousand years ago, and I ended up using so much power for the past half a year."

Hence, her limit was near—

Hinokagutsuchi would rather die than spell it out.

Out of pride, she was simply refusing to confirm or deny. However, after coming to the moon ruins, Hinokagutsuchi had become a little more honest, willing to provide information.

Because her end was near? —Hal did not entertain this thought.

He realized this possibility but deliberately ignored it.

The kind of behavior of seeking mutual confirmation to achieve a connection of minds, was completely unnecessary for these two. Haruga Haruomi and the self-styled devil were practicalists to the core. All they needed was cooperation when their interests were aligned. That was enough.

Hence, Hal brought up this topic.

"Roughly eight hundred years ago, when you were still queen, Princess Yukikaze was the one who defeated you, right?"

"Yes."

"Then you asked me, who lives in the twenty-first century, to duel with that princess. In that case, she can be considered our common enemy, right?"

"Do you really think that one as great as I would bear a grudge against Yukikaze this whole time?"

"Because your personality isn't great enough to let go of a grudge that is only eight hundred years old."

"Hmph."

"Anyway, I will need to duel our common enemy soon. I hope the great former dragon king will make good use of her grudge, one that compelled her to go so far as to exploit me."

"Your insolence knows no bounds, brat."

"I need information and advice. Hoping for your contributions in this regard won't bring divine retribution—That's what I'm thinking."

"Then it depends on whether you are clever enough or not."

Hinokagutsuchi sneered.

"Neither am I certain you have the mettle to best Yukikaze in battle..."

"All I can do is use cheap tricks to close the gap like before. By telling me about the existence of the Rune of the Mother Dragon, aren't you asking me to make use of it?"

"You think I am that considerate?"

"No, but even a demon from hell might show mercy on a whim

sometimes. It's not like I'll lose anything by being hopeful."

Despite Hal's frivolous tone, his expression was quite tense.

Of the cheap tricks that could come in handy during the battle against Princess Yukikaze, he could think of one more apart from the Rune of the Mother Dragon.

However, using it required guidance from an experienced predecessor...

This was his greatest gamble ever. Everything depended on luck, not just the talents and efforts of himself and his companions. How deep a bond existed between him and the self-styled devil with the twisted personality—That was the most crucial of all.

Hal braced himself and spoke, "Actually, I've got an idea. I might be able to defeat Princess Yukikaze so long as I become your—the self-styled devil's—successor."





# **Chapter 3 - The Start of a Gamble**

# Part 1

Hal was standing in the middle of the space.

The abyss of the macrocosm lay in all directions around him. Entering Hal's view was not complete darkness but an ever-changing canopy of night, decorated by the glow of countless celestial objects.

"The secret archives of Ruruk Soun... The grimoire passed down generations of dragonkind."

He called out to the endless seas of stars.

...Actually, this was not the real cosmos. At this moment, Hal's body was meditating in a certain tower in the moon ruins.

This was an imagined world that he had entered through meditation.

Through a vision, Hal was reading the secret archives of Ruruk Soun—a grimoire that recorded dragonkind's mystic wisdom—which had become part of his consciousness.

In the past, his formidable rival Pavel Galad had also activated the secret archives of Ruruk Soun during battle.

The silver dragon had used it to practice back when he had yet to grow accustomed to the dragonslaying sword. Hence, this cosmos could be manipulated according to Haruga Haruomi's thoughts...

"Show me a more complete view, which will make it easier for me to find the treasure I want. Zooming out is fine."

The macrocosm suddenly shrank.

Countless stars gathered around Hal in succession. Ten-odd seconds later, a huge number of spiral galaxies appeared in front of Hal. This also included the solar system where Earthlings lived.

An intricate miniature model of the universe containing countless galaxies.

If one had to use mundane objects for an analogy, this magnificent entity was roughly the size of a classroom blackboard.

Hal focused his eyes. In the secret archives of Ruruk Soun, doing so would allow him to see fine details on a microscopic level.

He was trying to find the seventy-two celestial bodies that Hinokagutsuchi had told him about.

They included stars, planets and satellites.

Some had been discovered by humans while others remained unknown to this day.

After finding seventy-two celestial bodies scattered all over the universe and summoning them all at once...

"O stars constituting mystic power and knowledge, gather in my hand."

Dozens of stars, scattered all over the place, traversed tens of thousands of light years to gather in Hal's right hand, lining up neatly to form a circle. There were exactly seventy-two of them.

"This is a bit too many..."

Hal released magical power and compressed them.

The seventy-two stars were reduced to forty-two, which then turned into runes completely.

This was the moment when forty-two runes of Ruruk Soun—magical symbols very familiar to Hal nowadays—were born. By summoning this arrangement, he should be able to invoke a certain spell.

"Assuming Hinokagutsuchi didn't trick me." Hal sighed.

This secret technique was apparently invented by the self-styled devil, which meant that he would not know how to use it if he left it to the magic gun as usual.

The only way to learn this spell was for her to instruct him on the

arrangement of runes.

"Anyway, this is my last lifeline..."

Hal muttered to himself and blinked.

The moment he opened his eyes, the cosmic abyss and mini-galaxies vanished. He was sitting cross-legged on the floor inside a room in the moon ruins used as a bedroom.

Phew. Just as Hal exhaled deeply and stood up...

Kyuaaaa—ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

"Rushalka?"

He heard a familiar voice.

Asya's partner, Blue Rushalka was flying towards him.

With her head extended towards Hal's window on the top floor, she kept flapping her wings, hovering midair like a hummingbird.

Rushalka was a wyvern with a body length of ten-odd meters.

Apart from the fact that she lacked forelimbs, she was quite similar to elite dragons in form and appearance.

The flapping of her wings alone was noisy enough. With every flap of her wing, Rushalka blew strong wind against Hal's face.

"What a racket..."

"I called her."

"What, so you're here too, Asya?"

Hearing his childhood friend's voice, Hal turned to face the source.

This window was over ten meters above ground. Nevertheless, Asya was outside the window.

She was hovering in the air—no, flying in the air.

Next to the gigantic face of the blue wyvern hovering in the air, Asya was flying in the sky.

"This is the Flight spell you learned yesterday, right? You've already mastered it completely."

"That's not all. Watch."

"A magic wand!?"

Unfazed by the sight of his childhood friend flying, Hal reacted with surprise this time.

A silver chain was wrapped around Asya's slender body with an arrowhead on one end serving as a counterweight.

The silver chain was like a living snake, clanging as it moved.

The counterweight on the chain's tip rubbed itself affectionately against Asya's face, like a snake playing with a snake charmer.

"You mastered the magic wand in just one day. You made that chain, right?"

"Yes. After all, I heard you explain what you did before."

"Amazing. You are very smart, or should I say, a genius."

It was only after Asya ended up in the same situation as him that Hal finally got a poignant sense of her natural talent.

However, the genius master-class witch, who used to be Europe's most powerful Shutdown Ace, frowned and said the following extremely coldly, "Learning synthesis magic on this level sooner isn't going to help much in tomorrow's battle."

"No no no. Just having a wand makes controlling magical power much easier."

"What's important is whether it has practical use in combat. I wouldn't be worried if it's just an ordinary elite dragon, but our opponent is Princess Yukikaze. Oh well, to me it's just consolation at

this point."

"What are you so pessimistic?"

"Not really. Even though it's consolation, something is better than nothing. Because fighting dragons without any consolation would be way too difficult."

"Hahahaha."

Words of a brave and seasoned warrior, impressive as ever.

Before acquiring a dragonslaying rune, his childhood friend had fought armies of Raptors all over the world, as well as the occasional elite dragon. Precisely because of that, she was able to say this kind of thing so calmly.

"Putting that aside, Haruomi, Rushalka and I will go there again."

"Again? Didn't Juujouji just finish investigating the Rune of the Mother Dragon?"

"Yes, but that rune is a more important trump card than a magic wand. I want perfect preparations, and that includes checking one last time."

Asya not only had natural talent but also devoted herself to training and effort, never succumbing to pride and complacency.

The prudence exhibited by someone like her, fully worthy of the genius label, deeply impressed Hal.

Just then...

Clang clang clang!

Asya picked up her silver chain and swung it swiftly.

This small movement summoned the runes of Teleport on top of Rushalka's head. The blue wyvern and her partner instantly vanished.

Apparently, she had gone to look at the Plato crater, just as she had

said she would.

"So she even learned that spell, huh...?"

He definitely could not match Asya in talent for magic. Hal was reminded of this fact again.

His childhood friend the genius witch, the Rune of the Mother Dragon, Juujouji and Akuro-Ou who had awakened the power of the Sun—and *that* particular arrangement as well.

Perhaps there really was a way to deal with Princess Yukikaze...?

"I hope so."

Hal hoped sincerely. There was less than twenty-four hours remaining until the duel with the princess was set to begin.

"Anyway, I have to continue with my preparations."

He was pretty much done with all the preparing that could be done indoors. Hal exited the stone tower through the window.





## Part 2

"Haruga-kun, where did you go?"

"Outside. I went outside the ruins to use runes to send messages to Luna and SAURU on Earth."

When he returned to the stone tower that served as their base of operations on the moon, Hal found Orihime inside, waiting for him.

Using the Ruruk Soun runes of "transmit my voice yonder," Hal had conducted interplanetary communications.

His original intention was just to test it out, but it succeeded even better than he had imagined. However, Hal did not tell them about *a certain arrangement* he had learned earlier.

He wanted to keep it a secret as much as possible. The girls would definitely stop him if word got out...

"By the way, Haruga-kun, could you please... undress?"

"Huh!?"

When Orihime timidly made a request, Hal stepped back in surprise.

Could it possible that saintly compassion had suddenly surged in Orihime's heart, making her willing to cross the final line with Haruga Haruomi who could very well lose his life in the duel tomorrow? No no no, but a considerate move of this sort would be very unlike a well-bred young lady such as Orihime—

"D-Do not get the wrong idea. This is a regular check up!" Orihime declared, blushing to her ears.

"Doesn't your body harden to become dragon-like when you use too much of your powers? I must check regularly."

"O-Oh, now I see."

Hearing Orihime's explanation, Hal understood. The guilt of his weird delusion made him reluctant to refuse Orihime. He hastily removed his shirt, leaving his upper body naked.

He found a random pedestal to serve as a seat.

Orihime circled around to his back, then started a "tactile examination" of Haruga Haruomi's not very muscular back.

"You don't need to examine so closely."

"I will be the one to decide that."

Orihime's right hand gently slid from left to right, checking how Hal's back felt to the touch.

"You girls helped cure me last time. I'm totally fine now."

Part of his skin hardened with a glass-like shine.

This symptom had appeared recently, a warning sign that acquisition of dragonslaying power led to dragonification.

Hal muttered, "I'll be a good boy and report any that that comes up. Trust me."

"That rests on the assumption that you won't deceive."

"Uh, well—"

Orihime took a shot at Hal then continued her examination.

First the shoulder then below, then even lower down. Finally after gently checking the texture at his waist, Orihime nodded.

"It looks like you are definitely fine. Nothing hardened."

"See? I haven't used much power after coming to the moon either."

"Since the back is fine, I suppose there isn't a need to check the front? Your body really seems to be fine."

"Huh? Don't tell me... You were planning on touching the front side

too?"

Even caressing his chest and abdomen gently with her right hand.

Hal could not help but wonder what he could do to make Orihime change her mind about ending the examination here. His facial nerves tensed up, a reflexive action whenever he did not want others to notice his dirty thoughts.

However, this was enough for Orihime to discern Hal's thoughts.

"You seem to be thinking about something inappropriate..."

"No, of course not. My mind is filled with nothing but gratitude for the gentle you."

"Goodness gracious. What a pervert you are!"

Though Orihime was a bit angry, she sighed in the next instant.

"I don't want you to turn into a dragon, but—Sure enough, I have to take this situation into consideration after all..."

"Hahahaha."

Orihime's face was shrouded in gloom out of worry for Haruga Haruomi.

Hal laughed out loud, a warm feeling flowing through his heart. Perhaps this was what people called happiness.

He had never experienced this before when he was always alone.

Precisely because of that—

He was afraid of loss. Logically speaking, Hal was going to lose everything, even his meager life, in the duel tomorrow. 99% certain.

Princess Yukikaze had mentioned "If I defeat you and you're fortunate enough to survive..."

But he knew that the probability of such a future approached zero. This charity condition of "surviving an all-out attack from the dragon

king Princess Yukikaze" was as fragile as a thread of spider's silk.

Hal's stomach began to hurt.

He even broke out in cold sweat. This was a stomachache caused by stress. In fact, Hal had been experiencing these stomach pains every now and then ever since arriving on this asteroid.

Extremely uncomfortable. He had difficulty sleeping at night, unable to achieve unbroken sleep till dawn.

"Because the previous battles always happened right away... There was no time for me to feel stressed. This time, with so much time, it's quite an ordeal, almost like 'having an execution scheduled a few days later'..."

He muttered, his eyes gloomy.

Ignoring the physical body, Hal's mind was still too human to be viewing things with detached perspective.

Stress was building up the longer he spent time at the moon ruins.

If only his opponent was a mere elite or Tyrannos.

But this time he had to confront dragon king-class, the strongest of dragonkind, and definitely stronger than him.

So far, Hal had twice fought dragon kings and survived, but that was because he had gambled his life on strategies that succeeded by chance. It was also thanks to him possessing trump cards unexpected by the two dragon kings—Princess Yukikaze and Hannibal.

"It will be fine. Asya-san is helping with research on how to use that Rune of the Mother Dragon, and didn't Kagutsuchi-san say 'it appears that prior preparations are sufficient' after listening?"

"More precisely, she said 'You could consider it sufficient, but possible not enough too'."

Translated into plain English, it was "I don't know!"

In addition, there was the trump card that Hal had secretly prepared, but there was not telling whether any of his cards would actually end up useful. There was nothing he could do about that.

"The previous battles" against Princess Yukikaze and Hannibal.

Now that he thought back to them—Neither of them were battles to the death. Both sides had reached a ceasefire before that point. But this time, it was going to be a duel to the death...

"Haruga-kun."

Orihime secretly walked up to Hal's side.

She drew very close, so the two of them were pressed intimately together. How unbelievable. Simply the touch of her body warmth was enough to calm his thoughts a bit.

"Did you forget? Akuro-Ou and I are very strong in critical moments."

"Now that you mention it, yeah, that's true. How should I put it...? Perhaps you two are like goddesses of fortune. It was the same in the first battle against Pavel Galad."

Thinking back to past experiences, Hal looked up.

"Probably thanks to your naked body, my luck has surged—"

"H-Haruga-kun! You still remember that!?"

"Of course! How could I possibly forget that wonderful image!?"

"And you snapped aback indignantly!"

"Anyway, basically it boils down to this... Sure enough, you're the only one who can be my mental support. It's the same in love matters too, you have to be my guardian goddess of luck—"

"W-Wait a second, Haruga-kun. What... What did you just say?"

When the panicking Hal slightly calmed down, it was Orihime's turn to be flustered.

She stared nervously at Hal, like she was hoping for something.

So cute. Hal immediately replied.

"Uh... Goddess of love and protection."

"In other words, you mean—love for me? For me and Haruga Haruomi to nurture human love, romantic feelings, and man-woman affection between the two of us..."

"Yes. All of them."

"Fufufufu."

"Juujuuji!"

"Haruga-kun!"

In a state of heightened emotion, the two hugged tightly together.

Then they kissed passionately.

...This could be considered "a dialog in preparation for the decisive battle tomorrow." But in fact, this was also a tryst for them at the same time.

"Tonight *again*, I will come over to find you after Asya-san falls asleep."

"Yeah."

"Even if you suffer from insomnia, I will still stay by your side."

"Yeah."

"Although you probably won't sleep better simply because I am next to you, I still want to do something for you no matter how small."

"Not at all. I'll feel at peace just from having you by my side."

"Fufufufu—Ah, here you go again exaggerating. I haven't finished talking, you know?"

"Sorry, I accidentally—"

Orihime's love and affection made Hal kiss her again.

Gazing gently at this good-for-nothing of a man, Orihime kissed Hal back.

"By the way, I actually thought of something. Probably because I'm just a step from leveling up to becoming a dragon, a new idea occurred to me."

"Specifically?"

"Lend me your ear. I'll explain to you."

"We are the only ones here. Is there any need to whisper?"

"Who cares? Whispering is more intimate."

"Here you go again, honest at a time like this... Go ahead, tell me."

"Yeah, thanks. Specifically, it's—"

Orihime swept her long hair behind her ear, exposing it.

Hal brought his lips close to whisper in her ear. There was something problematic with what he said, and even the Japanese girl with the sunny open-minded disposition glared at him with a "Haruga-kun—" in protest.

Even so, Hal still continued apprehensively and said, "So that's the long and short of it. Will you stay with me to do some mental training?"

"If this is definitely necessary for the duel against Princess Yukikaze—I won't refuse. However, is that really true?"

"Of course! Trust me!"

"Of course I trust you. But can you promise that you are sincerely doing this without ulterior motives?"

"....."



"How very honest of you. You cannot promise, can you?"

"Well..."

"Seriously... You must not say such things to any girl other than me, okay? If you promise me that, umm, then it's not like I can't make an exception and practice with you..."

"Juujouji..."

"Haruga-kun—Ah... I-Is this part of training too?"

"There's more to it. Well, sure enough, I really love doing this with you..."

"Sheesh. You are too honest... Ahhh!"

"S-Sorry. Was I too rough?"

"Don't worry—This is fine... Umm, I think I enjoy doing this with you—mmmmm!"

"Me too!"

Unlike previous occasions, the main reason for doing this was no longer for the sake of transferring magical power to a vassal sharing the same dragonslaying power.

Driven by emotions and impulse beyond that, the two of them embraced each other.

Clenching his right hand where the Rune of the Bow had surfaced, he tightly squeezed the left breast—the body part closest to the heart—of the girl he loved most in the whole world. In return, Orihime passionately allowed him to do as he pleased, in a state of ecstasy, accepting Hal's caress.

This was a world that belonged to just the two of them.

However, exhaling hot breath, Orihime suddenly spoke, "By the way... Asya was suspicious of our relationship earlier."

"Asya?"

"Yes. I was originally hoping you be there to help, but I managed to explain on my own and barely pulled the wool over her eyes."

"I see..."

Juujouji Orihime was not only inexperienced in love but also a little airheaded.

Her personality was also extremely straightforward. It was hard to imagine her female friends getting fooled, but right now, Asya had lost her feminine skills that she had acquired previously.

Thinking "well, it should be fine," Hal refocused his mind on the training.

"Juujouji—"

"Mmmm! Haruga-kun... Remember clearly how I feel, okay?"

"Yeah. I surely... won't forget."

"Mmmmmmmm...!"

Once again, they entered a world of their own, but...



Just as Orihime's slender body swooned and leaned back...

'Ufufufufufu...'

An adorable but sinister giggle was heard from outside the room.

It was the suggestive giggling from someone they knew well—his childhood friend and witch companion. Orihime froze in her posture,

still with Hal holding her breast.

"Asya-san!?"

"Indeed... It is I. Feeling a bit worried, I quickly finished what I needed to do, but to think I would see such a scene on my return. Although your stammering was quite suspicious, Orihime-san, I did have a faint feeling before that...!"

Hal's childhood friend Asya walked into the room.

She was smiling but did not look happy at all. This was merely a smile used to control the anger that had nowhere to go.

Oh right, even with her feminine skills diminished, Asya's bestial instincts were still intact.

Only now did Hal think of that. Then he said to Asya, "Yeah, to be honest, this is actually the kind of relationship we have."

"What the hell!?"

"I love Juujouji more seriously than anyone else, and Juujouji, you feel the same way towards me, right?"

"Y-Yes. I love Haruga-kun very much."

"H-Haruomi—"

Probably because Hal made his declaration too naturally.

Orihime immediately followed up after a brief pause. On the other hand, Asya was so shocked that she could not close her mouth.

For Hal, Asya was neither an older nor a younger sister, instead, she was a childhood friend known for many years.

Perhaps it was fate that she became the first one he told. And it was right before the day when his fate was going to hang between life and death...

In any case, Hal released his hand from Orihime's breast as though

nothing had happened.

He made the call to admit everything and started to explain.



## Part 3

"Oh right, tonight will be the night of the full moon."

Hal glanced at his pocket watch and said softly.

A mechanical pocket watch made with bronze. The time was just after three in the afternoon on September 10th. Furthermore, this pocket watch was also a Clockwork Mage used exclusively by members of SAURU.

For Hal as he was now, it was a redundant tool, but he still kept it by his side.

"Is it that? I recall an event known as the viewing of the mid-autumn moon." Hinokagutsuchi spoke with mockery in her voice.

"If they are going to organize an event, why not hold one where beautiful women are admired under moonlight...? I believe this occurred to me in the ancient past."

"Don't forget you're a former queen. Say something that fits the mood better."

"Hmph, staring at the moon is too boring. Incomprehensible to me."

"Fine. Anyway, it's an event that used to take place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the lunar calendar. Since adjustments are needed to fit with the current calendar, it happens on a different day every year."

Hal and Hinokagutsuchi looked up at the night sky together.

There was no full moon among the scattered stars of the night canopy, instead there was a round Earth roughly the size of a coin. The moon was underfoot.

Leaving the moon ruins, Hal walked to another plain on the moon, the Sea of Showers.

The black of "seas" on the lunar landscape was the color of basalt, terrain formed from lava that had erupted from underground then cooled.

Observing from the Earth, one could see a black area on the white moon.

Recalling this, Hal said poignantly, "I never thought I'd spent a night of the full moon on the moon itself."

"Who knows? If you draw your last breath before admiring the moon, then it would not really count as 'spending' the night."  
Hinokagutsuchi laughed maliciously.

She had come out from the magic gun that she had possessed, materializing into a young girl in a kimono.

This could very well be his last. Three days ago—at around 3pm on September 7th in Japan—Hal was taken to the moon.

Princess Yukikaze had told him she would only wait three days.

A quick calculation showed that seventy-two hours had just passed. It would be natural for the princess to come pick a fight any moment.

"Although I've made lots of preparations for this battle, how much difference do you think our struggling will actually make?"

"Against that lass Yukikaze?"

"Yeah. And it's Princess Yukikaze in serious mode."

"Simple. If she is serious about taking your life—No matter how it happens, Yukikaze is guaranteed to win."

Hinokagutsuchi predicted gravely. She did not look like she was joking.

Since she spoke without thinking, Hal reflexively argued back.

"Uh, this is a contest, you know? There's that saying, you never know who'll get the last laugh, right? Didn't I squeak through last time?"



"Because the battle to defeat Genbu-Ou was 'war.'"

"?"

"Whereas this time is a 'fight.' Do you understand the difference?"

"...I see. Sort of."

Realizing what the self-styled devil was trying to convey, Hal sighed.

In war, one would retreat to regroup once losses mounted to 20-30%. This was because casualties of this extent would affect an army's tactical plans. It was a general's job to regroup before further losses occurred.

A fight was different.

How far a fight went would depend on both sides' perseverance and will to fight...

"In addition, there is another decisive difference. Brat, you have grown far too strong."

"....."

"Yukikaze might show mercy if it were merely an angry puppy biting her. However, given your current strength, if you were to bite, she would probably intercept with her full power. A cornered beast is not going to hold back."

Neither his childhood friend Asya nor Juujouji Orihime were by Hal's side.

Like the time when he first obtained the power of dragonbane, only Hal and Hinokagtsuchi were present. Once again, Hal argued against the former dragon king's merciless words.

"But if I bite seriously, there's a chance I might kill the princess—"

"Impossible. No matter how many cheap tricks you pull out, struggling like a pathetic rat to bite the cat to death, your teeth will never tear into a berserk dragon king's throat. And have you

forgotten?"

"Forgotten what?"

"You said it yourself. You do not have what it takes to become a true king. Over these past few months, I have come to understand that deeply too."

"Hmm—"

Such opinions were quite unbiased. Hal grumbled softly, "I wasn't hoping you'd recite some kind of spell to stoke my courage, but with the duel about to begin, couldn't you be a little more sensitive about my feelings?"

"Fufu." Hinokagutsuchi smiled maliciously.

"Then you posed the wrong question to ask the wrong person."

"Indeed. Sigh, in that case, I'll just have to make the most of it and struggle to the very end."

Hal shrugged and summoned the magic gun with his right hand.

Hinokagutsuchi vanished. She had returned to the object she was possessing.

"Runes of Ruruk Soun—I'm counting on you."

The arrangement created by the self-styled devil when she was still a dragon king.

Hal summoned forty-two runes of Ruruk Soun overhead and used the secret technique he had just learned.

"Protect me..."

Muttering to himself, he activated the spell.

Hal's body and the magic gun instantly turned into particles of light and vanished into thin air. This was the same de-materialization used by leviathans and Hinokagutsuchi to suddenly disappear.

However, his mind and magical power had not vanished.

"Crimson Queen!"

Responding to Hal's voice, what materialized was a giant red dragon.

The dragon that once possessed the Rune of the Bow. After a long battle, with irreparable damage inflicted to its heartmetal, she had taken a finishing blow from Princess Yukikaze, the Arrow inheritor—

"Go!"

With wings outspread, the Queen flew into the sky.

Though slightly smaller than Red Hannibal, the Crimson Queen was quite large. Sixteen or seventeen meters long. Not only was she tall, but she also exuded impressive presence from her powerful musculature.

A contrast to the white dragon king's slender and graceful form.

A giant bow appeared in the Crimson Queen's right forelimb.

The bow was even longer than the Queen was tall. Made of red steel, with light as the bow string, it was the manifestation of the Rune of the Bow as a weapon.

Carrying just the mystic bow, the Queen kept rising.

She slowly but steadily accelerated, escaping the Moon's gravity, finally reaching a spot in the sky roughly a hundred kilometers away from the ground.

This was the same height as the asteroid where Princess Yukikaze lived.

"Okay... Let's begin," Hal said to the Queen.

Even though he was not in human form at the moment, Hal's mind was still linked to the Queen. Under Hal's gaze, the red dragon raised the gigantic bow.

Next, an arrow of light appeared in the left forelimb.

The red dragon notched it on the bowstring and drew hard, firing the arrow forward.

Boom! Imbued with the mystic power to kill dragons by the dragonslaying bow, the arrow flew with a long tail like a comet, tracing out its trajectory as it flew thirty or forty kilometers.

Up ahead was the disc-shaped asteroid where the ice tower was located!

It struck. Explosion. Flash.

The arrow fired by the Queen blew the asteroid to bits.

However, the white dragon king's slender and gallant form calmly flew out from the white light of the explosion.

Both the Queen and Hal used "eye of magic" to watch the white dragon. Suddenly accelerating, they charged straight towards the unharmed Princess Yukikaze.

The white dragon flew nimbly, as though responding to them—

Merely forty seconds passed.

The two dragon finally met on the Moon's orbit.

"O Haruomi! I never thought you would be the one to start the attack!"

"Because waiting for you to attack could end up puncturing a hole in my stomach. I was thinking might as well get started earlier..."

The voices coming from the two dragon's jaws was the same as produced by their human forms.

Even in space, the absence of air did not have any effect on dialog between dragons. The Crimson Queen was holding a red bow, but Princess Yukikaze was unarmed.

"Fufufufu. In the previous battle, it took me so long to turn into a dragon."

The graceful dragon king smiled proudly.

Hal could tell from a single glance. Her dragon face, which ought to bear no resemblance to a human face at all, showed a slight curl in the corners of her lips—He was able to discern this change.

He was not sure whether it was because he understood the princess' personality or because he was becoming more and more dragon-like.

"But this time... I have become like this!"

"Oh, that's right."

"This is proof of your efforts. Commendable!"

Unlike Hinokagutsuchi, Princess Yukikaze was not stingy with giving praise.

However, Hal still carried a heavy heart. He was thinking "I'd rather you act careless or underestimate me, and give me the gift of an opening I could exploit to attack, than praising me"...

"Hazumi-san, it is time to begin at last."

"Really!?"

The altitude was 4205 meters.

Luna Francois walked over with a solemn expression to inform her. Shirasaka Hazumi looked up at the night sky, dotted with stars. The stars were so numerous that they felt intimidating. They seemed so near.

This was thanks to the altitude, which exceeded Mount Fuji's height, as well as the clear air.

There was also the fact that they were far away from urban areas.

There were no light sources to overwhelm the starlight.

Hazumi's location was excellent for stargazing. After the summer expedition, this was her second time to America—the Mauna Kea volcano in Hawaii.

Near the peak were thirteen observatories from eleven different countries around the world.

One of them was the Hawaii Observatory of the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan.

Hazumi was sitting on a lawn in the observatory's premises.

The stars were so numerous that they looked like they were about to fall out of the sky. But tonight was a full moon. The bright moonlight meant that it was not ideal for stargazing.

"Senpai and the others are there..."

"Yes. Roughly fifteen minutes ago, the red dragon and the white dragon apparently started fighting on the Moon's orbit. The battle is shown live on the monitor in the observation room."

Hazumi recalled the observation room mentioned by Luna.

Inside a space that could not be considered large at all were LCD displays of all sizes and even quite a number of laptops. Several members of staff were there, checking images taken by the observatory's infra-red optical telescope.

The two girls had been given a tour as soon as they arrived at the observatory.

"The situation appears to be unfolding in Harry's favor. We managed to complete support preparations too."

"All of the credit goes to you, Luna-san. Thank you."

It was currently September 6th in Hawaii, just after 8pm.

It was nighttime. However, the time and date at Tokyo New Town in

Japan was September 7th, 3pm. This was due to the nineteen hours of time difference between the two locations. Dawn arrived at Japan first.

The duel against Princess Yukikaze would begin at this time—

Yesterday, this message had reached Luna Francois and Shirasaka Hazumi through Ruruk Soun magic.

This was also how they received the astounding news of "Haruga Haruomi and company were on the Moon."

After receiving Hal's message, the Trans-Pacific Area's genius Shootdown Ace had taken immediate action.

Mobilizing all of her connections and political capital, she requested full cooperation from the Mauna Kea observatory and staff, forcing them to comply.

Next, Luna and Hazumi hurried to the scene.

Taking a plane prepared by the Japanese American armed forces, they then reached the top of Mauna Kea via Cessna and helicopter. Although Mauna Kea was located in Hawaii, the island of eternal summer, due to the high altitude of 4205m, night temperatures approached zero and the air was quite thin.

This sort of environment imposed quite a burden on the body.

"I know you are probably quite uncomfortable, Hazumi-san, but your power is necessary."

Luna Francois spoke, looking at Hazumi's face.

"Please endure for a while. For our Harry and Orihime-san's sake, and Asya too."

"I-I am fine. Although the environment is harsh... I am still okay!"

She was not putting on a brave face.

Hazumi was definitely not physically strong and her health was

worrying, but—Surprisingly, she was not suffering much. Perhaps because she was very motivated.

Or maybe her physical stamina had improved a bit with her increase in magical power...

To insulate against the cold, Hazumi was wearing a white double coat even it was September, along with a knitted cap, a scarf and even gloves.

Luna Francois was wearing a black cashmere coat with a black Russian hat.

Traveling from late summer in Tokyo New Town to Hawaii, then ascending to this peak that was higher than the clouds, what an unexpected expedition. However—

"Compared to Senpai and the others who went to the Moon, this is nothing!"

"Indeed. We must use our power to help Harry. Moreover..."





"Yes!"

"There is *that*. Madam M offered a profound and mysterious suggestion. We must find a way to inform Harry."

Prior to the two girls' departure to Japan, President M had paid them a special visit just to tell them.

Remembering that advice, reassuring despite its short length of a few words, Hazumi nodded firmly.



## Part 4

Haruga Haruomi and Princess Yukikaze had fought once before.

After that, Hal had obtained the Rune of the Twin Katana and absorbed King Solomon's magical power, greatly increasing his strength.

Nevertheless, his main weapon was still the Rune of the Bow.

In contrast, Princess Yukikaze possessed the Rune of the Arrow as her only and absolute weapon.

In other words, both sides were well aware of each other's capabilities.

There were two tactics. The prudent approach would be to neutralize the enemy's advantage while looking for an opening to take advantage of. Alternatively, since they already knew each other inside out, might as well attack boldly.

A bold change in mindset. Seeing as they knew each other's best moves and tactics, a protracted battle of back and forth attacking and defending would only be a waste of time.

Hal's personality favored the former approach while Princess Yukikaze favored the latter.

"Fufufufu! Having made me wait for so long, are you still going to keep me in suspense? Sorry, I, Yukikaze, have no intention of taking detours!"

"Uh, you're going for a finishing move straight away!?"

What a candid young girl with a personality as straight as an arrow. The white dragon king suddenly unleashed maximum magical power when facing off against the Crimson Queen on the Moon's orbit.

Runes of Ruruk Soun appeared over the graceful white dragon's head.

A total of twenty-one runes, signifying "I descend from the heavens as the miracle of lightning, turning in the pioneering arrow that pierces the ground." This was Princess Yukikaze's prided move, a technique of assured annihilation.

"I hereby decree to my emblem, the Arrow of Sirius, I, Yukikaze, will now transform into the dragonslaying arrow!"

With her entire body glowing with blue-white light, the princess charged at the red queen.

The two dragons, red and white, were separated by several kilometers, but given the princess' dashing speed, she would close this distance in less than 0.1 seconds.

The arrow of godlike speed, living up to the name of the dragon king, flying through the macrocosm—

Despite his level as an opponent, Hal was able to intercept this attack, probably because he was very confident that Princess Yukikaze would surely attempt to decide the battle in the first move...

"Queen, we're going too!"

Twenty-one runes appeared over the Crimson Queen's head too.

They signified "I will fire the sun-shooting divine bow at the sky, to exterminate the sun." This was the technique of assured annihilation that Haruga Haruomi and his companions had relied on the whole time, his move of greatest firepower.

"My emblem—that's the Bow Stars of the Southern Sky, right!? Anyway, I'm counting on you!"

Notched on the red long bow was fire in the shape of an arrow.

The Queen fired. Incoming in a straight line, the blue-white flash of light collided violently with the crimson flames, just three hundred meters from the Queen.

"Is this the best you can do...? Kukukuku! Too naive, Haruomi!"

"Rune of the Twin Katana!"

Turned into a flash of light, the white dragon broke through the sun-piercing flames, charging straight.

The Queen was blown away despite her greater physique, instantly flying thirty or forty kilometers back like stardust. However.

The Crimson Queen spread both wings and exhaled flight magic.

Like a struck billiard ball, her massive body finally braked. Furthermore—More importantly, the Queen was unharmed!

"Wow!"

Princess Yukikaze's white dragon face was filled with joy.

"Splendid, Haruomi. Even Pavel Galad could no longer stand after taking a strike from I, Yukikaze, as an arrow!"

"Hahahaha..."

Hearing the princess' praise, Hal laughed helplessly.

Succeeding in defense beyond all expectation was the Crimson Queen, wielding a longsword in her right with a kodachi in her left, crossed in an "X" shape. These two blades had helped defend against the princess in her dragonslaying arrow form, in other words, acted as a shield.

Although he had barely managed to defend against the princess' prided technique of assured annihilation—

"You managed to trick me this time, but you will surely make a mistake if this were repeated two or three times. A 60% success rate, I would say."

That was precisely why Hal was laughing so helplessly.

At this rate, it would be no different from Russian roulette. The revolver would fire a bullet sooner or later and pierce his head.

"Sure enough, I've no chance of winning alone, not even if I aim for a draw..."

The ideal of "a man fights alone" was completely foreign to Hal.

He immediately focused his attention on his right hand.

He clenched his right hand tightly—Not his dragon form that was holding the two blades, but his astral form that was staying by the side of the gigantic red dragon.

"I'd need to prostrate in penance before Juujouji if I don't show results from my mental training!"

Using training as the reason, Hal had groped Orihime's breasts like mad, truly madly.

The number of times easily exceeded three digits, perhaps even reaching four digits. In any case, he had touched and groped Orihime's breasts without restriction, all the way until his right hand memorized the tactile feeling from her.

"Focus—"

Hal calmed his mind and focused his attention.

In his mind, he recalled the feeling, a perfect reenactment of his right hand groping, grabbing, touching, stroking Juujouji Orihime's wonderful breasts / bust / boobs to his heart's content.

His imagination was helping him establish a magical connection to her.

Orihime was not at the battle.

The Japanese witch was standing by at the Plato crater on the Moon.

Although the two of them were separated by more than 100km, the image reappearing in Hal's mind made him feel that the girl he loved most across the entire universe was by his side.

The Rune of the Mother Dragon was next to her.

"Show time begins only now...!"

If winning alone was impossible, then just borrow his companions' strength.

Hal began a new gamble.

"U-Using it the first time in a real battle without practicing ahead of time, will that really be okay?"

"Practice leads to failure, actually..."

At the Plato crater on the Moon.

The magic symbol resembling an infinity sign was manifested in the center, but because it was as big as the Nazca lines, from above, all Orihime could see were "a thick curve on the ground."

The one listening to Orihime voice her worries was in a state of depression.

Asya's face was gloomy to the extreme. She muttered, "The mind focuses to the limit precisely because there is only one chance. Especially when... You will be attempting magic unknown to mankind... Orihime-san, listen carefully."

Asya's aura of gloom was like a vengeful ghost lying in ambush against the begrudged.

She was offering advice as a senior witch, making educationally questionable suggestions.

"For a witch, it's not important to have a super boring honors student's disposition of endless practice to minimize the unexpected. Rather, it's the gambler spirit to wager everything on a single chance... The spirit of taking your entire life's savings to buy the year-end J●mbo lottery..."

Kuku. The indisputable genius witch laughed with reckless abandonment.



Incidentally, her eyes were like "those of a dead fish."

"Fufufufu... If all goes well, you can earn big bucks easily..."

"B-But what if you lose all your money!?"

"This kind of question is not considered. You only fail precisely because of irrelevant thoughts like these."

"...Coming from you, it seems to make a bit of sense."

Juujouji Orihime had won a national kendo championship before.

She could be considered an accomplished gambler too. Agreeing with certain parts of Asya's extremist theory, so Orihime changed her mind a little.

However, Asya quietly added, "Well, gamblers who die penniless in a ditch are also part of life..."

Asya had been like this ever since she found out about the relationship between Orihime and Haruga Haruomi.

Even so...

She focused her magical power as a Tyrannos, summoning twenty-three runes of Ruruk Soun in the air over the infinity magical symbol, completing all preparations deftly to control the mysterious rune that gave birth to dragons. This arrangement of runes was invented by Hinokagutsuchi then modified by Asya.

Anastasya Rubashvili was a master-class witch and Europe's former Shootdown Ace.

Her talent and power as a witch were flawless.

Indeed. Even when dealt a heavy blow by a romantic setback, she was still a true expert, fulfilling her mission perfectly—

Was this personality of hers the reason for her lack of romantic success, or was her lack of romantic success the cause of this personality?

(Looks like I should avoid bringing up my relationship with Haruga-kun for now...)

Thinking "I am so despicable," Orihime pondered.

(At least during this battle...)

Avoiding the topic would be better than accidentally provoking her, causing pandemonium. Because there were things they must do.

(Sob sob, I am sorry, Asya-san...)

While apologizing to Asya in her heart, Orihime came to a sudden realization. Her left breast suddenly felt as though someone was squeezing it tightly.

"Ah...!?"

"What's the matter, Orihime-san?"

"Haruga-kun seems to be transmitting magical power over! The battle against the princess—"

"Is reaching a climax, huh? But given her personality, the battle would most likely rise to the climax right off the bat..."

"A-Asya-san, let us hurry and begin!"

"Understood!"

The "groping" feeling kept attacking Orihime.

Haruga Haruomi had previously said, "As long as we do this mental training, even if we're far apart, I think we'll be able to construct a soul link!" She had angrily scolded him, "Haruga-kun, aren't you being too big of a pervert!?" and rejected him once.

In the end, Orihime relented with "seeing as this will satisfy you."

She had stayed with Hal, allowing him to train for a long time.

What Orihime cared more about was whether this could slow down the rate of his dragonification. But right now, she could clearly feel

the touch of Haruga Haruomi's right hand.

Sending his magical power into Orihime's heart, through her breast—

"Let's do this, Orihime-san! O Rune of the Mother Dragon, let the blessing of life descend upon here!"

"L-Let the blessing of life descend upon here!"

Together, Orihime and Asya invoked the secret ritual for activating the Rune of the Mother Dragon.

Next, the ground below them started glowing. It was a solemn golden glow. Seen from overhead, the glowing infinity sign would be visible inside the crater.

"Rushalka!"

"I am counting on you, Akuro-Ou!"

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The partners materialized behind the two witches.

The blue wyvern and the white fox-wolf. The two leviathans roared bravely, unleashing massive magical power from the most important organ and mystic source—the heart!

This was a unison magic ritual for controlling the power of birth.

To ensure the ritual's success, Asya had already called out twenty-three runes of Ruruk Soun in the sky over the crater.

They signified "O restless dragon souls, descend upon the world through the mother's holy emblem"—

"Rushalka, as the vassal belonging to the Tyrannos inheriting the dragonslaying chain, complete your mission!"

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhh—ahhhhhhhhhhh!

The silver-haired witch issued her command sternly. The blue wyvern spread her wings wide overhead and emitted a mighty howl.

The solemn and rigorous spell looked like a grand religious ceremony.

Sensing their magical power, the infinity sign underfoot glowed with greater golden brilliance.

The surrounding air seemed to take on a golden tinge—A solemn scene had been created around Orihime and Asya.

"Okay, Orihime-san, you too!"

"Yes! Akuro-Ou, this is the crucial moment!"

Clearing her mind of random thoughts, Orihime focused on outputting maximum magical power.

From far away, Haruga Haruomi was transmitting powerful magical power into Orihime's heart.

Relying on the idea that "even if I'm not present, I can still imagine the feeling of touching your breasts with perfect accuracy", he forcibly linked their souls together.

(My goodness. I cannot believe he learned this technique through that kind of method, Haruga-kun is such a big pervert...)

Like the time when he grabbed her breast from behind, sending magical power directly.

Orihime could feel deeply the bond between herself and the Tyrannos of the bow and twin katana. His magical power spread throughout her entire body, and his strong yet gentle touch remained the same as always—

"Mmmmmmm!"

Asya was present, so Orihime decided to hold it in as much as possible.

However, due to the quantity of magical power sent by Hal, Orihime was experiencing unbearable heat. Combined with the stimulation from ecstasy and intoxication—

Her body kept writhing. Even her voice was about to spill out.

(No! Even though I am not Haruga-kun, I must keep my expression in check...!)

With the combination of Orihime, Akuro-Ou and Haruga Haruomi's magical power pouring in, the golden glow shrouding the surroundings became even brighter than before. However.

There was no additional change. Logically speaking, there ought to be—

"A-Asya-san!?"

"Our magical power is lacking a little. Really just a little. If only I could raise my power as a Tyrannos... Or if you promoted to Level 5... It might be enough."

"No way!"

"Of course, there was no guarantee this plan would go smoothly in the first place—"

Asya bowed her head slightly and bit her lip.

Seeing the witch and renowned genius in chagrin, Orihime reflexively yelled, "Then please! Sh-Share your power with me...!"

"Eh!?"

"If we use that method, mentioned yesterday, I will probably—!"

"!"

Panic and fluster instantly turned into understanding. Asya rushed over to Orihime's side. Extending her right hand, where the Rune of the Chain was emblazoned, she grabbed Orihime's left breast.

Apart from her beloved young man's, her witch companion's magical power was also entering her body!

"Mm—mmmmmmmmmm!"

A strong feeling shot through her entire body. Orihime finally cried out. Seeing her reaction, Asya nodded firmly and asked her, "My magical power has reached you!?"

"Y-Yes. Th-There is an extremely potent energy flowing through my body!"

"It is greatly arousing you, causing you to squirm and moan erotically!?"

"Ch-Change your wording, okay!?"

"What do you want me to say!? Orihime-san is squirming this way and that, about to open the gates of paradise! I can't believe that jerk Haruomi did the same thing to Luna and Hazumi-san too!"

Yesterday, after admitting his relationship with Orihime, Haruga Haruomi had proceeded to explain to Asya.

Touching breasts was only for providing magical power and strengthening their connection. Both Luna Francois and Shirasaka Hazumi had gone through the same experience too.

...All this time, Hal had not told Asya about this power up technique.

Was it because he could not bring himself to see Asya as a girl no matter what—Uncharacteristically, Orihime speculated, trying to probe the psychological depths of the young man named Haruga.

Burning in wrath, the genius witch unleashed a roar from her soul.

"Th-These are the breasts, huh!? These breasts seduced Haruomi, huhhhhhhhhh!?"

"Ah—mmm! Asya-san... Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Orihime cried out, but for completely different reasons.

Regardless of the process, the two witches' emotions rose to a climax. In response to their hearts, their magical power also reached a maximum, and a miracle happened at last.

Out from the ground under their feet—the Moon's surface—countless bubbles emerged.

Bubble-like spheres kept flowing out from the Rune of the Mother Dragon.

This was the moment of birth for pure-blooded dragons.

Something similar had happened before, but there was a decisive difference this time—Hal immediately noticed.

"Why are there so many...?"

He had heard that Raptors were born in clutches of three hundred or so.

But right now, within Hal's field of vision, it felt like the spheres emerging from the Rune of the Mother Dragon easily exceeded three hundred.

Hal used Quantity Calculation magic.

"Thirty, forty... two hundred, three hundred, four hundred... A thousand, two thousand—Uh, there's more!?"

This was human magic completely unrelated to the wisdom of Ruruk Soun.

It could instantly count the number of objects within sight. Normally, it was used in situations without urgency, such as birdwatching or researching traffic flows.

The result calculated by this little spell left Hal speechless.

"Eggs—These Raptor eggs... number over ten thousand? And still increasing..."

"Hmph. I expected the quantity to be impressive, but not this impressive."

"You expected this!?"

Hal's astral form was waiting behind the Queen that was wielding the crimson bow, looking down at the Moon.

Dressed in a kimono, Hinokagutsuchi appeared by this side. The two of the were floating in the abyss of the macrocosm.

"More or less. This is the rune used by dragonkind, a race without females, to produce young, you know? Compared to males, good for nothing except fighting, or females who had ascended to the dragon king throne like myself and Yukikaze, perhaps when used by females more compatible with that rune—"

"Meaning that..."

"If your deductions are correct, my memories as a human... such as time spent with my mother, would have been long forgotten."

"So something that Asya and Juujouji have, but not you or Princess Yukikaze, huh..."

The result was the birth of countless eggs. One by one, they cracked open.

The newborn dragons were very similar to Rushalka. Lacking forelimbs, with a pair of wings sprouted from the shoulders, in other words, they were wyverns.

However, instead of Rushalka's blue, their bodies were white like Akuro-Ou.

They also had more tails than Rushalka. Not as many as Akuro-Ou's nine tails, but these dragons had two tails.

"I guess they count as the children of Rushalka and Akuro-Ou."

White minions with two tails.



At a body length of seven or eight meters, they were lesser dragons like ordinary Raptors. The newborn "little white wyverns" numbered in total—

"Forty thousand, huh..."

"Hmph. A ragtag army, but with such quantity, perhaps it might be possible..."

Forty thousand eggs had been ejected from the crater in the Moon's northern hemisphere.

Those eggs all hatched, producing forty thousand white little wyverns. One could consider it the gathering of a great army.

Seeing this phenomena, even Princess Yukikaze could not help but exclaim, "So many winged lizards...!?"

The princess had just been sent flying by the Rune of the Twin Katana, and was twenty or thirty kilometers away.

But Hal, who possessed both a dragon avatar and a mage's extraordinarily sensitive perception, easily noticed the white princess' surprise.

Hal immediately made his decision.

Now was the time to counterattack!

"Rune of the Bow, go!"

He ordered the Queen in dragon form to fire the bow.

The arrow of light was targeting the Moon and not Princess Yukikaze. The Queen casually shot an arrow at the equator of the Moon's surface.

Instead of attacking the Moon, his goal was to prepare a new weapon  
—

"Excellent!"

Hal nodded firmly.

The satellite known as the Moon had a diameter of 3500km. Humans called the dark part of the surface the "moon rabbit," comparing it to a small animal.

Right now, *a gigantic rune* had appeared on the Moon's surface, even bigger than that rabbit.

"A tilted half-moon" outlined in red—The Rune of the Bow.



## Part 5

"Luna-san, look at that!"

"The Rune of the Bow has appeared on the Moon—Harry intends to end the fight."

At Japan's National Astronomical Observatory at Mauna Kea, Hawaii.

Shirasaka Hazumi was standing on a lawn within the premises, pointing at the full moon. Observed from the Earth, the Moon was roughly the size of a human head—

On its surface was a red symbol signifying the dragonslaying bow.

Luna Francois Gregory looked at what appeared to be a scene of the white full moon bleeding and instantly realized the significance.

The two witches were not the only ones who saw this emblem.

Gathered at Mauna Kea to monitor the thirteen observatories, researchers from all over the world were looking up at the emblem that had appeared on the Moon, greatly surprised.

At this very moment.

Everywhere on Earth where night had fallen and the Moon was visible...

The Rune of the Bow could be seen on the full moon.

Indeed. This dragonslaying bow, desperately summoned by one whose magical power was second only to the dragon kings, was visible to ordinary people on Earth even without magical sight—

Gigantic and powerful.

As for the Rune of the Bow appearing on the night of a full moon, causing panic all over the world from speculating "Are the dragons going to launch a main offensive!?", that would be a different matter.

In addition.

Right now in Tokyo New Town, there was an eccentric who could see the rune on the Moon even though it was only 3pm in Japan.

"What's the matter, Prez?"

"Don't tell me a real UFO is coming?"

President M was staring into the blue sky from the sports field of Kogetsu Private Academy.

The president of the UFO Research Club was endowed with mysterious senses. Dressed in a loose garment akin to a maternity dress, her plump body was full of motherliness. Next to her were junior members of the club, Mutou-san and Funaki-san.

Less than a week had passed since Pavel Galad's attack on Tokyo.

They were living together with other locals who were using the school as a shelter.

President M murmured, "No matter what, you guys lose if you go for a frontal duel. Because the key to this decisive battle rests upon how crafty you can go..."

Words of advice to her junior who was not present.

The Rune of the Bow summoned by Hal covered the entire Moon.

In other words, this was a grand spell that turned the Moon itself into a dragonslaying bow. It also treated the children born from the Rune of the Mother Dragon carved on the Moon as "arrows," a secret ritual to use the Moon as a gigantic bow.

There were forty thousand newborn white wyverns.

Each had the Rune of the Bow on their forehead, proving they were Hal's minions.

"Nwoooooooooo!"

The wyverns kept attacking Princess Yukikaze.

They flew at the noble dragon king from every direction. Furthermore, these minions of the bow would self-destruct at close range. As soon as they got close enough for the princess to become caught in the blast, the Rune of the Bow on their forehead and the rest of their body would instantly heat up and explode.

"I cannot believe you are resorting to such annoying cheap tricks, Haruomi!"

Princess Yukikaze grumbled at the commander who was out of sight.

The forty thousand wyverns had turned themselves into suicide bombs, gathering around the princess to form a secure perimeter, intending to kill her through explosions.

It was as though Princess Yukikaze was caught in a mine field.

"Fufufufu! Do not look down at me. Compared to blazing fire and raging winds, I, Yukikaze—"

Infused with the power of dragonbane, explosions and flashes of light kept erupting.

It was hellish space. However, despite being surrounded by such a powerful vortex of heat, Princess Yukikaze's gallant and confident attitude did not change.

"...Am faster!"

She accelerated intensely, flying deftly, dodging the shock and heat of the explosions.

Escaping the range before a blast reached her, instantly evading the next explosion by instantaneously accelerating further, then eluding the following explosion with godlike speed—

Princess Yukikaze kept repeating this process.

Dragonslaying explosions kept detonating in front of the princess. However, the forty thousand wyverns surrounding her continued to pursue, circling ahead of her, keeping the rapidly flying white dragon king in the center of the encirclement at all times. Hence—

Breaking out of this mine field would only happen when all forty thousand wyverns had exploded in suicide.

However, Princess Yukikaze remained fearless.

Simply by flying at super speed, she had already caused over twenty thousand wyverns to explode in vain...

"Impressive as ever, Princess Yukikaze."

Seeing the dragon king's approach, which was a little too honest, Hal could not help but praise.

There ought to be a better way, such as using magic to teleport, or deploy a defensive barrier.

But the princess' movements would most likely slow down the instant she called out runes of Ruruk Soun to use magic, thus getting her devoured in explosions.

"Simple is best. As long as she keeps flying around like an arrow, there won't be any openings, huh...? She is truly someone completely opposite of us."

Hal's astral form and the Crimson Queen were hiding.

They had moved from the Moon to somewhere closer to the blue home planet.

On a satellite orbit twenty thousand kilometers from the Earth.

Using telekinesis, he had gathered meteor fragments and other space trash such as rocket and satellite components to create an impromptu pseudo-artificial satellite. Lying on top, he then hid his presence.

Naturally, he used stealth magic such as Visual Interference.

"That being said, I did quite well in the fight against Pavel Galad."

Holding the bow and an arrow of light, the red dragon was in a sniping pose.

As usual, he used long-distance surveillance magic to keep an eye on his opponent. Since he could freely control the trajectory, there was no need to worry, all he had to do was hide.

"Since I have to do it, might as well go the whole nine yards..."

Improving on the tactics he had used in the Tokyo duel, he applied them to real combat.

That was his goal. The net of encirclement formed by the explosions of forty thousand minions would very likely be breached. However, he was going to launch his attack the moment before that, targetting the princess just when she was the most tired.

"Sniping, huh?"

He never thought there would come a time for him to imitate a certain thick-eyebrowed assassin.

"I hope it'll work..."

Rapid fire was out of the question. He must strike the first time, one strike one kill.

Instinct told him that there was probably only one chance to hit Princess Yukikaze with a sniping attack. Besides, if rapid fire and a curtain of bullets could take Princess Yukikaze's life, she would have died in the suicide bombing encirclement that was like a mine field.

Thus, he could only fire one arrow.

He had to settle the match with a guaranteed one-hit kill, his fastest and strongest attack.

Also, he had to pour all of his magical power into that one strike.

"...By the way, I need to tell you this first. I don't think I'll be able to



control my power very well, you know? After all, I have to smash her with a 'boom!'"

"Hmm."

"If you continue to possess my gun, I might end up using all your energy."

Right now, Hal was in astral form, whereas the wand, the magic gun, was merged with the red dragon's body.

Residing inside it, the self-styled devil said nonchalantly, "Telling this to me is pointless... My energy is insufficient for sustaining my form if I leave your wand. Try harder."

"I will try hard, but it'll be difficult."

"Then at least take care of that Yukikaze lass."

"Understood."

"Heh."

This was the last conversation. In the end, neither of them bid the other farewell.

Whether this sniping attack turned out to succeed or fail, he would never get another chance to talk to Hinokagutsuchi—That was Hal's feeling.

But perhaps this suited them quite well.

"Almost time, huh..."

The Moon was thirty-eight thousand kilometers away from the Earth.

Princess Yukikaze was decorating the long path between these two places with spectacular brilliance. Wherever the white dragon king flew past, there were consecutive explosions like a comet tail.

Out of forty thousand minions of Hal's, there were almost less than two thousand remaining.

The moment before they were wiped out would be the best sniping opportunity.

"Let's do it, technique of assured annihilation."

The Crimson Queen drew the bow tight with her right hand—

The arrow of light was shot at last. The incantation of assured annihilation, "I will fire the sun-shooting divine bow at the sky, to exterminate the sun" turned it into an arrow that could even pierce the sun.

In that instant, Hal could faintly sense that the former queen was vanishing while he kept close attention to the arrow's whereabouts—

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Above the Earth, in space at an altitude of thirty-five thousand kilometers.

He watched personally as the white princess' dragon form was pierced by the arrow of assured annihilation, penetrating a dragon's vital—the heart.

(It's not thorough enough, but I did strike the heart... The heartmetal.)

Through his super senses as the one who fired the bullet, Hal perceived this.

This was evidence that Princess Yukikaze still attempted to dodge the magic arrow despite encountering such an underhanded sniping attack. Hal could not help but shudder.

However, it was definitely true that the princess' dragon form had stopped moving.

Floating forward in space due to momentum instead of flying like a comet, her body was going to be pulled by the Earth's gravity and start falling sooner or later.

But before that happened...

Ten-odd white wyverns stuck themselves on the princess.

Then exploded. Exploded. Exploded. Exploded. Exploded. Exploded. Exploded. Exploded—

This was a final concerted attack delivered to Princess Yukikaze. However, after the series of explosions subsided, Hal was shocked when he looked at the princess' remains in space.

"Don't tell me—"

One of her two white wings and her left arm were almost about to fall off.

Her majestic body, extremely graceful despite being a dragon's, was covered with injuries, large and small. Her right eye was gouged out, probably unable to see. Clearly unconscious.

But Hal could see fingers of her right hand twitching.

Although weak, what seemed to be heartbeats could be heard from the heartmetal that should have been partially blown away.

"She's still alive? Is this a dragon king's resilience...?"

He felt a bit of relief, actually, could this be because he had formed some kind of friendship with Princess Yukikaze?

No matter what, by this point, it should be impossible for the princess to deny Haruga Haruomi's victory. Hal took a deep breath, wanting to exhale myriad thoughts—In the next second...

"I see."

A lovely voice was heard from close by.

"So that arrow was shot from this far away? Fufufufu, Haruomi, you are quite malicious. I cannot believe you took such pains to take my life..."

"No way."

Hal looked back, only to see Princess Yukikaze standing on her magic surfboard.

It was her human form, clad in a white one-piece dress. Hal instantly figured it out. Her inability to turn into a dragon at will, conversely meant—

"You can also separate into dragon and human forms?"

"Hmm? Oh, I was desperately trying to dodge your attack and ended up separating from the dragon body. Forgive me, my body is quite unreasonable."

"Hahahaha."

Princess Yukikaze had candidly explained the reason.

On the other hand, Hal's laughter rang dry and hollow.

'No matter how many cheap tricks you pull out, struggling like a pathetic rat to bite the cat to death—'

'Your teeth will never tear into a berserk dragon king's throat.'

He naturally thought of what Hinokagutsuchi had predicted.

Then he poignantly experienced "Oh I see, so that's what she meant, huh?"

Staring at the loser in front of her, Princess Yukikaze nodded firmly.

"You are very clever indeed, Haruomi. Your tactics are good. Of course, I am not talking about the arrow. That arrow was at most 'passable' but instead—"

In sequence, she looked at the Crimson Queen, unable to lift a finger due to consuming all energy, and Hal's astral form, then grinned.

"That spell is more praiseworthy. While fighting with you, I was marveling at you."

" ... "

"When you were fighting Pavel Galad, Haruomi, you instantly lost your human mind because the violent soul of dragonkind had devoured your heart. However, you applied wisdom and fought as a human to the very end this time."

"I simply learned from last time's lesson."

In that battle in Tokyo, the Crimson Queen's violent impulses had been unleashed fully.

The dragon body had absorbed Hal's consciousness, merging with the Queen. This time, he had used a little trick to avoid repeating the same mistake.

"Fufufufu, sure enough, your ideas are so interesting, Haruomi. Specifically, how did you do it?"

"If I simply turn into a spirit, my consciousness would most likely end up absorbed by the dragon like last time... So I asked Hinokagutsuchi—the former Crimson Queen... 'Teach me the spell that turned you into a ghost after Princess Yukikaze defeated you'."

"Oh?"

"This is the spell that allowed her ghost to remain on Earth for over a thousand years, so I was thinking it might be useful, and I lucked out..."

Hal had poured everything into that arrow and yet his enemy had evaded it effortlessly. Hal did not even have the strength to fight back. With slumped shoulders, he muttered and explained.

"I originally worried it wouldn't work, but a dragon king's magic is truly different. This time, using that spell to make myself like a ghost, the wildness of dragonkind did not devour me at all. Though in the end, the battle still ended up reversed..."

"No, I am surprised you devised such a plan. Well done."

Since his body was about to turn into a dragon, ending up in a state like Hinokagutsuchi's made no difference—Hal simply took the plunge. That was how he managed to fight Princess Yukikaze so

spectacularly. However, in the end, even this move failed to succeed.

Princess Yukikaze joyfully told the dejected Hal, "Then Haruomi, it is my turn to show you what is strength."

"I can fulfill last time's promise right away and become yours..."

"Relax, I have not forgotten. If you take this attack and come crawling back from the underworld—I, Yukikaze shall accept you as my minion!"

"Hahahahaha."

The princess' answer was as expected. Hal laughed dryly again.

Sigh, he knew things would come to this—He really wanted to shrug.

"The queen who lent you power seems to have vanished."

"!?"

"Whether you follow her or not shall depend on your mettle. I shall not say farewell to you. En garde."

Learning that the self-styled devil had vanished, Hal was shocked speechless.

With a wave of her hand, Princess Yukikaze summoned nine runes of Ruruk Soun. Hal was instantly shocked to see them.

He had seen this arrangement before. "Purification of evil spirits."

A technique of exorcism for purging the likes of evil ghosts, spirits and wraiths from the world.

Inside Solomon's ark, the ancient witch Shamiram had used this magic. Under her instruction, Hazumi had awakened goddess power and mastered this ability perfectly.

At this moment, the princess was trying to use the same mystic technique to eliminate Hal in his ghostly state!

(Don't tell me Princess Yukikaze is also...!?)

A certain hypothesis entered his mind.

Princess Yukikaze was human once. Unmistakably.

Perhaps during her human days, the princess was like Shamiram, priestesses who summoned ancient leviathans. Furthermore, she had enabled her partner to awaken as a goddess...

Goddess power was able to control special spells such as healing and purification.

Magical power that ordinary leviathans and dragons could not use no matter what.

(On further thought, the first leviathan we encountered capable of using goddess power was the princess' minion, True Genbu-Ou!)

Only now did Hal remember.

But it was too late. He would not have the chance to use this information in the next battle.

Proof of this was the Crimson Queen—the red dragon that was his other body—whose heartmetal had stopped. Hal's astral body, essentially the queen's soul, was starting to disintegrate.

Hal could feel the spiritual power from the holy spell of "purification of evil spirits."

He could no longer think.





# **The Conclusion between the King and the Imitation**

# Part 1

"Haruomi!"

"Haruga-kun!?"

Asya and Juujouji Orihime had stayed on the Moon to control the Rune of the Mother Dragon.

Normally, it would be impossible for anyone to know Haruga Haruomi's situation thirty thousand kilometers away on the orbit of an Earth satellite—But it was different for these two girls.

The mini-wyverns encircling Princess Yukikaze had reduced in number from forty thousand to less than a thousand five hundred.

For this large group, the two girls who had conducted the birth ritual were their mothers.

This was a magical bond that rivaled that between lord and vassal.

Precisely because of that, the mini-wyverns could share their sensory data with the girls.

"The Crimson Queen..."

Asya spoke in astonishment.

Just earlier, Princess Yukikaze had been wounded grievously in a distant battlefield. However, the princess' human form had separated from the dragon body to attack the Crimson Queen that was hiding in satellite orbit.

Then she had used some kind of magic—

This caused the powerful Crimson Queen to start collapsing.

The ruby-like dragon scales lost color, turning into what looked like century-old weathered brick. The gigantic body began to flake and fall apart.

The body seemed like it could no longer sustain its form, having lost its source of magical power.

Sooner or later, it would crumble completely, weathered.

In human form, the princess witnessed with satisfaction the red dragon's demise, riding her magic surfboard to soar again. Her destination was the white dragon body floating in space. She was planning to merge with her injured body again.

However, the two witches on the Moon were in no mood to pay attention to Princess Yukikaze.

"What happened to Haruomi...?"

"Look at this, Asya-san."

Orihime called out to Asya in a completely unemotional voice.

With a hollow expression, and reluctance to face a vague realization of the truth causing the brain to shut down, she showed the back of her left hand to her witch companion to see.

"The Rune of the Bow—Haruga-kun's rune has disappeared..."

"!"

Asya had lost her soul link to Haruga Haruomi when she became a Tyrannos.

If this link remained, she would be able to have his emblem, the Rune of the Bow, manifest on the back of her left hand any time. Orihime should be able to do this too—

"Rushalka!"

Asya used flight magic to fly into the sky.

She summoned her blue partner. Rushalka had been standing by, flying over the Rune of the Mother Dragon at the Plato crater.

"Let's go! Attack target is Princess Yukikaze, follow me!"

This was the only chance to bury Princess Yukikaze and eliminate this threat forever. She and Rushalka had no chance of winning except by attacking the wounded princess.

Hence, Asya valiantly flew into the sky without any hesitation.

More importantly, this was a battle of revenge. She was to avenge Haruga Haruomi, who had lost to a dragon king.

The blue wyvern flew over, following her master who was flying towards Earth's satellite orbit—

As for the Crimson Queen...

Hinokagutsuchi's former body and Haruga Haruomi's avatar had started to fall.

It was gradually approaching the blue planet's ocean.

Drained of power, the Queen could not even overcome the Earth's gravity.

The shock and heat from crashing into the atmosphere was mercilessly obliterating the red dragon's body.

In the process of crashing to an altitude of ten thousand meters, the gigantic body became more and more severely damaged—

The Crimson Queen was now in the sky over the northern Pacific. She had lost her lower body, left arm, and most of her two wings.

Nevertheless, someone still succeeded in transporting her there.

"Glinda, I am counting on you again! Gravity Control!"

Master-class witch Luna Francois invoked pseudo-divinity a second time.

At the Hawaiian island of Kauai, on a beach near Kilauea. Luna and Glinda, the three-headed lion leviathan, were looking up together at the falling Crimson Queen.

From this vantage point, the Crimson Queen looked like a meteor crashing to the Earth's surface.

Catching the powerless Queen, pulling her towards the Earth's gravity —In fact, it was Luna Francois and her partner using pseudo-divinity, drawing the Queen on a trajectory leading to the Earth's surface, then applying force to bring her to Hawaii's immediate waters.

"I managed to bring her here at last..."

Maintaining maximum magical power output from Glinda, Luna murmured to herself.

Since the Crimson Queen happened to fall into the sky over the northern Pacific equator, Luna was able to drag the Queen over forcibly. A little farther away and even the master-class witch might not have been able to accomplish such a feat.

"Luna-san, Minadzuki is warning us! She says "

"I know! Don't worry, leave it to Glinda and me!"

Shirasaka Hazumi was on the shore too, while Minadzuki was standing by in the sky.

The two of them had removed their winter coats and changed into lighter wear, looking up at the stars dotting the night sky on this island of eternal summer.

The Rune of the Bow on the full moon had disappeared.

Same for the rune that was supposed to be manifested in the two witches' left hands. The implied significance left Hazumi in terror. Even so, Luna still issued orders.

"Glinda, final attempt. Truly the third time, Gravity Control!"

This was gravity manipulation for deceleration.

Ruohhhhhhhhhh! Ruohhhhhhhhhh! Ruohhhhhhhhhh!

Glinda's three heads, the lion, the goat, and the dragon all roared at

the same time. The eruption of magical power sustained the gravity that was pulling and guiding the Queen.

After a few minutes, the moment arrived.



The giant dragon body of the former Crimson Queen landed on the sea at Kilauea like a landing craft that had used a parachute.

"Hazumi-san, let's go!"

"Yes!"

Ships, helicopters and ground units of the US Armed Forces were standing ready at the back to support them.

The two witches, one Japanese and one American, made the call to head over to the Queen's landing spot with the military and nodded to signal to them.

Twenty minutes went by.

Luna and Hazumi had boarded a US Marine helicopter and flown to the sky directly over the Queen that was floating on the sea surface.

Normally, the Queen would have sunk into the water, but Glinda was supporting the body using pseudo-divinity.

However, Hazumi instantly gasped when she looked at the red dragon on the sea from the helicopter.

"No way..."

"This is one out of many possible outcomes, so naturally, I predicted it, but..."

Luna Francois sighed lightly too.

The Crimson Queen was floating on the sea, face up.

Everything below the waist, the left arm and both wings were practically gone. The rest was all covered with wounds and missing bits and pieces. More seriously, the two open eyes showed no signs of life. One could not sense any consciousness or reason from them.

Deep in the Queen's left chest—The heartmetal had stopped beating.

No signs of movement, no magical power. The giant red body had turned into a corpse.

"Senpai—Senpai... Sob sob sob sob sob!"

Hazumi collapsed on her knees, her head down, crying.

As for Luna Francois, she was a seasoned warrior despite her young age and had gone through similar farewells many times. However, she felt a certain liquid, one that she had never seen before until now, slide down from the corner of her eye. In that very instant—

"!?"

Luna looked left and right, surveying the interior of the helicopter.

She perked her ears then stared at the sea surface—the Crimso Queen's remains—then placed her hand on the back of the softly sobbing junior witch.

"I am sorry, but it looks like we have a mission to complete."

"Huh..."

"With the Earth's fate on the line, we must find something lost."

With great fortitude, Luna nodded at Hazumi whose face was wet from angel's tears.





## Part 2

"Over there, huh?"

Riding her magic surfboard, Princess Yukikaze approached the Earth's atmosphere.

Because her injured dragon body had drifted to this region.

Pursuing her other body that was floating in space, she ended up in a zone five hundred kilometers above the Earth's surface, quite near the orbit of the International Space Station.

(As a side note, altitudes beyond a hundred kilometers were essentially a vacuum and considered part of space by humans.)

At this very moment—

"Her body that was on the brink of death" was lying there in front of her.

The white dragon king had been sniped from a great distance by Haruga Haruomi and ended up all covered with wounds.

Roughly fourteen meters in body length, her body was the most petite among the dragon kings. Right now, unable to fly on its own power, it could only drift like a reed in the sea of stars.

However, a smile appeared on the face of the princess' human form when she recalled the culprit responsible for this.

"Fufufufu, that Haruomi."

Quagmire. Formidable foe. Tumultuous events. Challenge.

These were all what Princess Yukikaze loved deeply. She felt the most alive when focusing her mind fully on overcoming extreme crises.

Tasting joy for the first time in a long while, the princess was in a very good mood.

"Going this far to delight me... How adorable of him."

Smiling, she focused her mind.

Of the wyverns that had attacked the princess' dragon form, there should be more than a thousand left, but they were apparently not nearby.

Did they scatter like a ragtag army that had lost its master?

"Or are they planning a comeback...?"

*I hope so*—Princess Yukikaze thought.

She needed to regroup in case of emergencies.

The white dragon's left arm and left wing were about to fall off. Injuries large and small covered her entire body. The right eye was blinded too.

"Let me have a look."

Princess Yukikaze used runes of Ruruk Soun.

The arrangement of "healing hands." A spell for treating her dragon form that was on the verge of death.

Although she had no idea when she learned it, the princess also possessed the ability to control "goddess power." Just like True Genbu-Ou.

The white dragon's minor wounds began to heal and close up.

"Impossible to recover instantly, huh...?"

The injuries were not light enough that healing magic could cure them instantly.

Princess Yukikaze shrugged. In the next instant, her body and the surfboard both vanished. She had merged with her dragon form.

"Although this ending isn't boring... Hmm?"

An adorable girl's voice was coming from the white dragon king's jaws. At this moment, the princess noticed.

The approach of a dragonslaying aura.

However, it was not the dragonslaying bow, instead, it was most likely—

"The chain user, huh?"

Her right eye's vision had yet to recover.

However, using just her remaining left eye, she could see clearly. The imitation lacking in forelimbs—a blue wyvern—was approaching.

Next to her was the successor of the Chain.

The Tyrannos and her vassal were under imperishable protection.

"Aren't you going to run or hide!?"

"Normally speaking, dealing with the likes of you would be a waste of time."

Fufufufu, Princess Yukikaze in dragon form laughed suggestively.

"After all, you are but a baby bird that became a Tyrannos for barely two days. Nevertheless, for this battered body of mine, an opponent like you may prove just right. More importantly—"

The Tyrannos of the Chain confronted the white dragon king squarely, glaring viciously at her.

Sharp, intense, yet without loss of wisdom. Though her experience was lacking for a Tyrannos, here eyes belonged to an excellent warrior.

"The fighting spirit you exude... is not bad. I, Yukikaze, like it."

"Then it's my turn after Haruomi?"

"Hahahaha. Only if you can compare to Haruomi. I am not expecting that much. Show me your mettle. Bring it on!"

"You don't need to tell me that! I'll be the one to avenge Haruomi!"

"Haruga-kun... He didn't—die... did he?"

Unable to cry or get angry over it, neither did she dare accept it.

Juujouji Orihime was sitting paralyzed on the Moon, her mind blank.

The significance of the Crimson Queen crumbling as she fell towards the Earth, and the significance of the Rune of the Bow disappearing from her left hand, she knew.

Even so—As long as she refused to confront it, refused to acknowledge it...

Perhaps she could still believe in miracles.

"Probably... impossible. Because Haruga-kun despite being a boy, he is a complete mismatch for descriptions like resilient or immortal. Why on earth did he get roped into this kind of thing...?"

Haruga Haruomi's talents were actually the opposite of his original personality.

So far, this juxtaposition ended up being the reason he could compete against the immensely powerful dragon kings. But the gap in power had finally manifested now.

Still, this was probably inevitable.

There was no method for obtaining greater power except by turning into a dragon.

But taking such a path would mean he would lose his memories as Haruga Haruomi, probably undergoing a dramatic change in personality—

"So long as he is still *alive*, perhaps that might be a better outcome."

Orihime finally spoke those taboo words.

Tears welled up in her eyes. Impossible to control. Her tears flowed without stop. She could hear nothing except her own sobbing. However.

"I must go after... Asya-san..."

Sitting on the Moon, Orihime clenched her fist.

Just as she mustered what little was left of her energy, intending to go after her companion who had left on her own, Haruga Haruomi's childhood friend—

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

Orihime's parter howled softly to emphasize her presence.

"Akuro-Ou...?"

The white nine-tailed fox-wolf's massive body was ten-odd meters long.

Using her giant face—her white fur-covered cheeks—she rubbed against Orihime's body.

"A-Are you comforting me?"

Though leviathans were known as "serpents," they were not violent magic beasts.

They were intelligent, loyal, and quite considerate of their partners. Especially Akuro-Ou, probably because of her canid nature, she was gentle like a loyal dog.

Orihime finally lifted her head. Seeing the white fox-wolf's expression, she gasped.

Akuro-Ou seemed to be pleading with her, pleading "give me power —" The one and only partner, shouldering the fate of fighting dragons together with witches, was definitely asking Orihime "give me more power."

"Could it be for avenging Haruga-kun...?"

Orihime dismissed her speculation as wrong as soon as she finished her sentence.

Akuro-Ou's eyes were clear. Neither anger nor hatred were visible, instead, her eyes were filled with selfless determination to complete the mission whatever it took.

"What—are you trying to do...?"

Her partner simply gazed at her sincerely.

Then Orihime noticed. Why were they still alive?

"We are clearly on the Moon..."

What had been protecting Juujouji Orihime from all unfavorable elements in space and on the Moon—lack of oxygen, weak gravity, radiation, solar heat, low temperatures in places shaded from sunlight—was the barrier known as "imperishable protection."

Normally, it was pearly in color. Previously, Haruga Haruomi had turned the protection transparent at Asya's suggestion, which was why Orihime had not noticed instantly.

The protection granted to Orihime by the young man Haruga was still in effect? If he were gone, then the protection would no longer be sustained, right!?

"No way—Is it you? Akuro-Ou."

She focused her mind and tried to sense where the power protecting her was coming from.

No mistake. With certainty, Orihime asked. The nine-tailed fox-wolf rubbed her face against Orihime again in apparent affirmation.

"Why are you able to...?"

Only Tyrannoi and dragon kings were capable of using imperishable protection.

Akuro-Ou could not possibly possess this power. Could it be—

Orihime remembered. There was one decisive difference between her partner and the others such as Minadzuki, Glinda and Rushalka.

"The connection is still there?"

Saying that, Orihime noticed.

Earlier when taken to the silver dragon's barrier, she had made the same mistake. Her link with Haruga Haruomi's soul had not vanished completely.

It was simply harder to connect because the two of them were in different worlds.

Haruga Haruomi was the one who had conducted Akuro-Ou's birth ritual. Orihime's partner was the leviathan with the most intimate bond with him.

Not only that, but Akuro-Ou's senses were sharp, beyond any comparison with humans.

Hence, she could not jump to conclusions that the link between their two souls had been broken...

"I couldn't help it. I saw with my own eyes the Crimson Queen crumbling and falling to the Earth."

Orihime's lips were grumbling, but a smile appeared on her face.

Akuro-Ou noticed. Even though the link seemed like it was no longer present, it was still possible to summon the power of dragonbane as long as they prayed with sincerity.

Then to protect Orihime—

"You used power for my sake..."

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhh.

Akuro-Ou called out in apparent confirmation.

The white fox-wolf's eyes were calm with no signs of vengeance. She



was still pleading with Orihime "give me power—" However, the power Akuro-Ou wanted was most likely—

"Let me try!"

She was finally able to comprehend the thoughts of the partner who could not speak.

"It is the second time now. Even without Asya-san's presence, I will succeed! O Rune of the Mother Dragon, let the blessing of life descend upon here!"

Orihime and Akuro-Ou were still at the center of the Plato crater.

This time, she performed the secret ritual of life on her own, manipulating the Rune of the Mother Dragon, the magic symbol in the shape of an infinity sign.

Naturally, Orihime's magical power could not compare with Asya who was a master-class witch, and on top of that, a Tyrannos.

However, she had a trump card.

"Akuro-Ou, pour the power of the sun into the Rune of the Mother Dragon!"

The Moon's cycle of night and day took fifteen days to complete. Fortunately, it was currently daytime at the Plato crater on the Moon's surface.

Sunlight—The "fire of life" that nurtured all life was abundant right now.

Orihime tried to use the spiritual power of the Rune of the Mother Dragon to activate the secret ritual of birth. For her, sunlight was the most reliable ally. Using magical power from the pseudo-divinity of the Sun as well, Orihime and Akuro-Ou focused, trying to elicit a new miracle.

Soon after...

"Akuro-Ou, look!"

The land underfoot began to glow golden.

The infinity sign on the crater began to give off light again.

In addition, the white mini-wyverns from earlier had gathered in the air above by the time she noticed. There were more than a thousand of them, those that had not self-detonated in the fight against Princess Yukikaze.

They were all taking surprising action.

One after another, the wyverns landed in front of Orihime and were absorbed into the infinity sign on the Moon.

The goal was not returning them to the rune that had given birth to them.

"These children are willing to lend us their power. This will probably succeed!"

Juujouji Orihime was trying to bring about the birth of something else—

Over a thousand wyverns had returned to the Rune of the Mother Dragon, offering their bodies as sacrifices, to become part of it.

Understanding that through intuition, Orihime nodded vigorously.



## Part 3

"Allow me to say this in advance for the record."

Hinokagutsuchi had said this prior to teaching Hal the secret ritual of turning into a ghost.

"This is not a spell for creating a ghost that cannot die."

"Then what is it used for?"

"A secret technique to reincarnate a person into an immortal god."

"I-Immortal?"

An unexpected term had suddenly cropped up. Immortal god. The power of dragonbane and dragon kings were plenty grandiose already, but this even god was mentioned.

"Something along these lines? Transcending beasts, transcending humans, turning into a god..."

"More or less. A thousand years ago, before I fought that lass Yukikaze—I had already lived long as a dragon king. Hence, I was honestly a little bored."

"Oh..."

How long exactly was "long" for a dragon king?

Definitely more than a millennium or two. Five thousand years. Ten thousand years. Possibly more than a hundred thousand years. Indeed, getting bored after sitting on the throne for so long would be all too natural.

"As such, I decided to devise a secret technique for becoming a god, a good way to kill time while I was at it. But there was one major problem. It was impossible to know how much power one would obtain after performing the ritual, and it was irreversible too. This prevented me from mustering the effort to give it a try."

"Because it's basically a secret ritual for reincarnation."

"Indeed. It would be a problem if I could no longer shower my love upon the beauties in my harem."

"And you said you were bored? Looks like you were really enjoying yourself!"

"Hmph, that is neither here nor there. In any case, it was not a spell one could recklessly experiment upon oneself. Even if I tricked a few random people to serve as experiments, they would not be able to learn the spell at all unless they were mighty warriors on the level of dragon kings."

"I'm so glad the devil's plan ended in failure."

"In the end, during my fight with Yukikaze—"

"You took a fatal wound, so you used the spell for reincarnating into a god, right? So how did it go?"

"I would not call it a success... Compared to an ordinary ghost, indeed, I am free. However, the power is still nowhere near an 'immortal god'."

"Yup."

Although there were restrictions, after her death, Hinokagutsuchi could still use her magical power from when she was alive, appearing and disappearing elusively, even materializing herself to eat things. More importantly, she did not move on to the afterlife, spending a thousand years idly, occasionally interfering in human society—

A transcendent being that was on the level of cheating for sure, but nowhere near as powerful as an omniscient and omnipotent god.

"I believe it can re-purposed. Further improvement could turn it into a secret ritual for reincarnating into a lich or a vampire lord," Hal said with a sigh after listening to the earlier explanation.

This had happened in the Moon ruins when he was alone with Hinokagutsuchi, after meeting Sophocles.

"There's really no time for that, though."

"However, brat, I am deeply surprised that you intend to settle things with Yukikaze by turning into a half-baked immortal. Are you giving up on being human?"

Hinokagutsuchi laughed maliciously to mock Hal, who glared at her.

"Giving up is irrelevant here. I stopped being human long ago."

"True."

"By this point, I can only consider it the same as accepting body modification surgery. After all, using a body that's about to turn into a dragon is not enough to defeat Princess Yukikaze."

Hal was already one of those monsters that could hardly be called human.

He had to admit that he had merged with a dragon before.

"Putting that aside, things were going pretty well during my fight against Galad until the Crimson Queen absorbed my consciousness. I want to take a gamble. As far as I know, you're the most resilient ghost in the whole wide world."

"Ha! Would a crafty brat like you ever take a seat at this sort of gambling table, the kind where luck is the only factor!?"

"I can't help it. I don't have a single card left in my hand. Apart from leaving it to fate and draw a new card from the deck, I don't have a choice."

"Hahahahaha!"

Hinokagutsuchi had thoroughly mocked the demoralized Hal.

Even so, she still generously instructed Hal on the secret technique for turning into a ghost. Hal originally had doubts on whether it would go smoothly, but it ended up succeeding.

On further thought—

He was forced to make a job change to a ghost from a man who was about to turn into a dragon.

This situation was so tragic that it actually felt a bit comical. Perhaps the self-styled devil had been willing to instruct him without reserve precisely because she saw this point. Furthermore—

Perhaps there was something similar to a bond between him and Hinokagutsuchi—No no no.

They were not the type to go sentimental.

Haruga Haruomi and the former dragon queen were supposed to maintain a relationship based on aligned interest the whole time. Thanks to that, Hal had barely managed to survive...

(Hmm—)

Even though he could maintain his state as an astral body, Hal overturned his earlier thought.

(This isn't really "surviving.")

To be exact, he was currently on the beach of a certain island.

Time was night. The air seemed quite clean. The starry sky was very beautiful.

Thrown ashore by the waves was a semi-automatic handgun with the color of steel and decorated with gold.

Hal's soul was affixed to his personal magic gun, barely hanging on to remain in this world.

The princess' "purification of evil spirits" had almost erased him, but Hal had survived the crisis in the nick of time, entering the Crimson Queen's body.

That being said, the Queen had also started to disintegrate immediately.

Inside the Queen was the magic gun that had been absorbed before

the battle, so Hal imitated Hinokagutsuchi and possessed it too.

(In the end, I fell down to Earth together with the Queen's body...)

After crashing into the atmosphere, the red dragon was damaged all over.

The magic gun was included in the fallen remains.

Based on scenery Hal saw on his way down, he deduced that he was somewhere in the northern Pacific Ocean. Probably the Hawaiian archipelago.

(Not Hawaii Island or Oahu but more to the northwest—where the Battle of Midway had taken place.)

He was very worried about Orihime and Asya whom he had left on the Moon.

His childhood friend could still draw on her powers as a Tyrannos, but if Hal's beloved lacked imperishable protection, she probably would not last more than an hour—

(I hope Juujouji will actively take my power to use.)

In fact, even though one of them was on Earth while the other was on the Moon, their bonds through the Bow and the Twin Katana ought to allow him to ascertain her safety immediately.

But as he was right now, Hal could not do it. Possessing the magic gun barely allowed him to keep his soul in this world, like the weakened Hinokagutsuchi, unable to do anything else.

(Contacting my companions on Earth—Can't do that either.)

Was he going to be swallowed by the waves and sunk into the sea just like this?

Was Orihime okay? What were Princess Yukikaze and Asya doing now?

He was worried sick. But not falling into the sea was plenty fortunate



already—

(...That's not completely right.)

Hal took back his earlier words.

A man was walking on the beach where waves were breaking on the sand.

An eccentric man dressed in a suit, Sophocles. He was the super ancient man who had described Haruga Haruomi as very similar to him. A former Tyrannos, he had lived thousands of years without turning into a dragon, possibly by using some method to alter the nature of his body, like Hal had done—

If possible, Hal wanted to meet Sophocles and clear up his questions, but...

(I'm pretty sure nothing good will come out of meeting him at a time like this.)

For some reason, that was what Hal instinctively thought when he saw the expressionless Sophocles.

He sensed a crisis. Why? Was it because his sixth sense had sharpened due to becoming a spirit-only existence? He had an intensely bad feeling of premonition.

"Haruga Haruomi, my how you have changed."

His voice was magnetic as always.

"I know you are a young man who dislikes fighting. For surviving all the way till now despite disliking fighting, I truly wish to praise you from the bottom of my heart."

(D-Despite saying that, you're—)

Sophocles calmly spoke to the semi-automatic handgun that had fallen on the shore.

He apparently discerned Hal's state with a single glance. Hal tried his

hardest to convey his thoughts to Sophocles.

(Aren't you being much scarier than usual? I can sense carefully concealed intent to kill... Something like that.)

"Hmm."

Ominously, Sophocles neither confirmed nor denied.

"Actually, I was thinking. Princess Yukikaze harbors incredible affection for you. Although you are on the brink of death right now, you did keep your promise and survived. In that case—I expect the princess to keep the Tyrannos of the Bow and the Twin Katana as her pet, until he breathes his very last breath."

(Who knows? I do think she'll keep her promise.)

Hal remained wary of Sophocles' intentions while answering.

(But given her personality, she'll probably ask me to continue fighting her once I recover.)

"Very likely. But you already... have no more options apart from turning into a dragon. Unless you turn into a dragon to fight, you will only achieve as much as this time, at best."

(Yeah...)

"But apparently, you would rather die than turn into a dragon."

(...)

"Fufufufu, willing to turn into a ghost, yet refusing to walk the road to becoming a dragon king? I really wish to support you, but regrettably, that will be challenging. Because you not only possess the Bow and the Twin Katana, but have also obtained the Rune of the Ring."

That was the dragonslaying rune he had stolen from King Solomon, the Tyrannos from ancient Israel.

Hal secretly felt alarmed. Sophocles was impressive as ever, to think

he even knew about this rune that had not been publicized.

"Very well. A Tyrannos who possesses as many as three dragonslaying runes, yet has no hope of becoming dragon king. Would it be right or wrong to allow him to roam free? Or —"

The strange man in black muttered.

"Given the opportunity, erase his existence to liberate the powers of the Bow, the Twin Katana, and the Ring. Wouldn't this be more beneficial to maintaining balance in our game, the Road to Kingship?"

(That's what you intend... to do?)

"No, I am simply stating one possible perspective."

(Th-Then what are you doing right now?)

The arrangement of runes he had seen earlier was appearing over Sophocles' head.

"Purification of evil spirits," the secret ritual performed using goddess power. If struck by that move again, Hal's soul would most likely begin his journey to heaven or hell for real this time!

(You're going to use this spell on me!?)

"Oh, I forgot to mention to you, but ancient serpents and priestesses are not the only ones capable of employing goddess power. A long long time ago, at Hyperborea in the sky, during the pinnacle of the human world, among male priests there existed some who possessed the same ability. In fact, I was one of them."

(Y-You are definitely changing the subject on purpose, right!?)

"I shall not make excuses. Farewell, Haruga Haruomi. I sincerely applaud your achievements... However, it is time for you to exit the stage."

(Wahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?)

Hal was facing a gigantic crisis that he could do nothing against.

This was possibly the most dangerous situation after his first enemy—the elite dragon Raak Al Soth.

However.

"Glinda, Laser Breath!"

An unexpected strike. A heat beam shot out from the side, sweeping across.

It caused Sophocles to vanish from before Hal, i.e. the magic gun.

The breath released by the lion, the center head of the three-headed leviathan, had vaporized the eccentric man.



## Part 4

"This is Senpai... Isn't it!?"

"The cavalry made it in time, okay, Harry?"

Luna Francois was holding the magic gun, i.e. Hal, in both hands. Shirasaka Hazumi was standing next to her, watching worriedly.

Thinking he ought to be able to communicate telepathically to these two girls, Hal replied:

(Yes, thanks to you, I'm saved. Thanks.)

"Senpai!" "Harry!"

The two witches cheered. Sure enough, it was very hard for them to sense that Hal was still alive when he lacked a physical body with nothing left but a gun.

They had left the shore and gone to the back of the beach.

There were several coconut trees there. A tropical land, apparently.

Futhermore, two familiar "serpents"—Glinda the Good Witch of the South, and Minadzuki the guardian of Tokyo New Town—were waiting ready in the starry night sky.

(Where exactly is this place...?)

"The northwest of the Hawaiian archipelago—A small island among them where ancient Hawaiians lived a long time ago. It took me a lot of work to pull the Queen to these parts after she crashed down from satellite orbit."

"Luna-san and Glinda worked very hard!"

Through information provided by the two witches, Hal basically understood the situation.

The two girls had rushed to the observatory on the Mauna Kea volcano, then did everything they could to make the Crimson Queen fall nearby, and taken a transport ship from the US military to reach here.

(So that's how they were able to meet up with me so fast, huh...?)

Reasonable reasons. However, Luna shook her head.

"This is one of the reasons, but not all of it. We initially thought you already died. After all, the Crimson Queen that we took such pains to retrieve had disintegrated."

"But someone told us to hurry and find your gun, Senpai."

(Someone? Who?)

"That voice—belonged to Hinokagutsuchi-san."

"It seemed to be her last words... just before she vanished together with the Queen's dragon body."

Hazumi's eyes were filled with tears. Even Luna seemed beset by grief.

Hal deliberately avoided responding to this. The self-styled devil had apparently provided some after-sales service at the last moment. Was this the spirit of service for a transaction partner, or personal sentimentality for an accomplice who had shared in many crimes together?

"But I'm actually quite surprised that a shady guy like Sophocles got taken out just like that." Luna Francois voiced her doubt.

"Did he pretend to get hit, but actually escaped? Like a lizard severing its tail to survive."

(Possibly. And perhaps...)

Sophocles was reportedly a Tyrannos in the ancient past.

Perhaps he had modified his own body to prevent dragonification,

thus losing his previous combat ability, thus allowing Glinda's surprise attack to defeat him so easily—

Hal thought of this possibility, but there was no concrete evidence.

There was a much more practical problem to consider instead of this speculation.

(Putting that aside, what happened to Princess Yukikaze? Juujouji and Asya too!?)

"We have yet to receive updated news on Orihime-san..."

"Right! Asya-senpai is currently engaging Yukikaze-san in an aerial battle!"

(Ehhh!?)

"We confirmed already using the Mauna Kea observatory and spy satellites. The white dragon and Rushalka are fighting a super high altitude battle near the stratosphere. Probably thanks to you injuring the princess, the battle is currently even. Quite good."

(Asya and Princess Yukikaze!?)

This latest news was too surprising. Hal became extremely anxious.

(Hmm. What Asya needs most right now is support, but the way I am right now, I can't even rush over to her side! The Crimson Queen is out of commission too.)

"Senpai..."

(If I could use magic at least...)

Possessing the magic gun allowed him to anchor his soul, just barely.

This was Hal's current predicament. Even the most basic of magic was beyond him. His life was literally hanging on a line, barely staying in this world. However, doing this was already consuming all of his energy—



If he had a body right now, he would be gnashing his teeth.

Hazumi gently picked up the magic gun, i.e. Hal!

"Senpai, please leave this to me!"

It was so sudden. Hazumi, the second-year middle schooler, only fourteen years old, hugged the magic gun tightly, pressing her developing bosom against it.

(Shirasaka!?)

"Last time when you turned into a dragon, Senpai, doing this turned you back! Surely, this time again—!"

Hazumi shouted while pressing her bosom against the magic gun.

Unfortunately, Hal could not feel that soft sensation despite having merged with the magic gun. It might have been different if he were in dragon form, which was at least biological...

(I-It's okay, Shirasaka. Even if you do this, I currently—)

"Harry, what are you talking about!? Let's try this first, desperate times call for desperate measures!"

Surprisingly, even Luna snatched the magic gun from Hazumi's hands and pressed her bust, the most magnificent bust known to Hal, against it.

No, that was not all.

She even placed the magic gun in her cleavage—

(Puff-puff!?)

Hal recited the legendary, even magical onomatopoeia.

At this very moment, Haruga Haruomi was encountering surprisingly good fortune, like the early members in the story of collecting Dragonballs.

"N-No, Luna-san! Please let me do it!"

"No, have you forgotten, Hazumi-san? Fulfilling human desires to the limit will help Harry to recover. We must cooperate and do this together."

"Right—Th-Then for me to join in... is alright?"



"Of course. Come, let us help Harry 'puff-puff'."

"!? I have never heard of such a term!"

"I have yet to confirm, but I am confident that Harry will enjoy this immensely. So together, we will..."

"Y-Yes. Senpai, how does it feel?"

"I am so glad that you are the one with me, Hazumi-san. Had it been Asya, her chest is too flat, 'puff-puff' would've been impossible."

"R-Really?"

"Physically challenging. How is it, Harry? Is my love reaching you?"

"Luna-san!? Y-You are kissing Senpai too!?"

"Why not? Because I love Harry. You can do it too, you know?"

"..."

"Sorry, looks like that would be a bit too hard for you."

"N-No! For Senpai—Senpai, I too..."

Luna and Hazumi's kisses kept producing smooching sounds.

Then the repeating "puff-puff" needed no description. Even so, Hal could not feel anything, having lost his human body.

How unfortunate. How futile.

O God, of all times when I need a human body so very much!

(U-Uwahhhhhhhhhhhhh!)

Hal's very soul screamed for the first time in his life.

Not a gun and not a dragon, he wanted to return to a human body. He did not mind even if he lost all his abilities and magical power as a Tyrannos. For this moment—I want a corporeal body!

A wish and desire coming straight from the heart.

Having lost his body and warm blood, what boiled as a substitute was Hal's soul.

No theory or petty trick could compare to Hal's wish this very instant.

Next, perhaps the soul-level wail created an opening—Haruga Haruomi's magical power instantly exploded!

It was possible now. Hal uncharacteristically shouted in hot blood.

(At least—give me human form!)

Next to Hazumi and Luna, Hal's human appearance came into view.

Using magic, he had created an illusion of himself, recreating Haruga Haruomi in uniform, the sleepy-eyed male high school student. Since it was an illusion, his body was translucent, sorry about that.

"Harry, your magical power recovered!"

(Yeah. Although I can't recover to normal, something this trivial is still within my power.)

"Oh right, Senpai! Please accept *that!*"

As soon as Hazumi called out, the surroundings suddenly darkened.

The emerald serpentine dragon leviathan flew lightly over the two witches, blocking light from the full moon and the stars.

The object referred to by Hazumi was held in Minadzuki's left forelimb.

She was holding a red metallic orb. Hal recognized it straight away. It was the most important organ in a dragon's body.

(The Crimson Queen's... heartmetal!)

"Indeed. When we rescued her, the Queen had already lost more than half her body. I immediately extracted the heartmetal and asked Hazumi-san and Minadzuki to use healing magic."

Luna handed the magic gun to Hal's illusion.

"I think this is the reason? The Queen's body has fallen apart, yet that heartmetal continues to give off beautiful light... Say, Harry, don't you think you get a chance for a retake when you fail your final exam?"

(That's true...)

To be honest, Hal believed he had no chance of defeating Princess Yukikaze no matter how much he struggled.

But perhaps he could struggle a little more. During this time when the girls were cheering him on.

Hal, in his soul-only state, sent his thoughts to the magic gun and the heartmetal.

(Come back to me again.)

The magic gun and the heartmetal gradually de-materialized and merged with Hal's soul.

Perhaps due to absorbing powerful artifacts, Hal's magical power increased again—

(This time I have to materialize my body!)

The instant his thoughts were conveyed, the translucent illusion acquired mass.

Haruga Haruomi's body and uniform were converted into physical matter perfectly. This was the mystic technique of materializing the soul, which the ghost progenitor Hinokagutsuchi occasionally used.

"Harry!"

"Senpai!"

"Hmm—Does this mean I've changed from a partial dragon to become more human or less human...? Anyway, I succeeded in reviving. I wonder how long it'll last...?"

"Who cares? No matter what, it's hundreds of times better than

dying!"

"I-I think so too!"

The devil and the angel, the two witches with opposite personalities were all smiles.

Hall nodded. Stepping on the Hawaiian beach, he looked at the western sky.

"I should get going. Asya is fighting alone, right? And—Juujouji seems to be calling me."

"Nee-sama!?"

"Yeah, looks like she worked hard on the Moon."

Hal's magical power had recovered to its peak.

Thanks to that, the soul links of dragonslaying runes were also completely restored. Hal's super senses could fully receive the thoughts of the person who had been working hard alone on the Moon.

(Haruga-kun, did you revive!? Can you hear my voice!?)

Yes. I hear you clearly. I am coming to you now.

Hal transmitted his thoughts to the full moon hanging high in the Hawaiian sky. The moment just as he prepared to depart...

"Oh, Senpai, please wait. Someone had a message for you!"

"A message?"

"Yes, from President M."

The person brought up by Hazumi was surely not one to be ignored. Hal straightened his back.

"Did President M offer a prophesy or life principle?"

"Yes. First of all, 'as much as possible, avoid fighting fair and square'."

President M had pointed out the core of the matter right away, leaving Hal speechless. Although it was no help even if he kept this advice engraved in his heart, he was still utterly impressed by President M's clairvoyance.

"President M is terrifying as always... What else?"

"Follow your feelings and go crazy to your heart's content!"

"...Huh?"

"Follow your feelings and go crazy to your heart's content!"

"....."

"Harry, is there any profound philosophical significance to this advice?"

"Who knows? Maybe it's to be taken literally, 'follow my intuition and act boldly.' Anyway, I really have to go. Thank you, both of you!"

Hal thanked the two girls again and de-materialized.

He dispelled the corporeal body he had just constructed and returned to spirit state to rush to the sky. He did not even use flight magic.

This would not have been possible if he still had a body of flesh.





## Part 5

Anastasya Rubashvili, aka Asya.

Until a couple of months ago when her partner's condition suddenly deteriorated, she had always been the witch known as Europe's strongest Shootdown Ace. Furthermore, she was one of only a handful of Level 5 witches in the entire world.

However, this veteran warrior was currently engaged in a battle she had never experienced before.

Flying at the super high altitude near the stratosphere with Rushalka, Asya had the Earth's vast blue oceans beneath her.

More importantly, her enemy was a monster feared by humanity and known as caesar draconis.

"Fu—"

In the guise of the white dragon king, Princess Yukikaze chuckled.

She was flying at supersonic speed sufficient to escape the Earth's gravity.

Furthermore, Asya and Rushalka were pursuing her closely at the same speed, trailing 300 meters behind.

The dragon king who was like a snow fairy was clearly confident.

"O Tyrannos of the Chain, you sure can fly! Rare are those capable of keeping up with these wings of Yukikaze!"

"Oooh. Stop being so full of yourself."

The princess' superior attitude made Asya grumble.

At first glance, both sides' speed were on the same level.

Asya and Rushalka were using the "high-speed flight" arrangement of

Ruruk Soun runes, using everything at their disposal to surpass their speed limit.

Not only were they holding back nothing, they were pushing themselves to the absolute limit. Furthermore.

Princess Yukikaze had yet to fully heal her wounds.

The wing that was almost severed seemed to have healed gradually, but the left arm did not regenerate, neither did the gouged out right eye. The effects of healing magic had yet to take on in full.

Her body was in an awful state.

In spite of that, Rushalka still failed to catch up to the princess.

"We won't be able to keep up once the princess recovers..."

Of all the leviathans used by witches, Rushalka's flight speed was the fastest.

This situation was thoroughly devastating Asya's pride and confidence. She originally thought that with the power of Ruruk Soun, no dragon would be able to match her speed—

"Nothing less expected of a dragon king."

Asya's right arm was wrapped in a chain from elbow to wrist.

This was the magic wand she had personally synthesized. Having just started on a Tyrannos' path, Asya gained much help from her magic wand. However, ultimately what she trusted most was still—

"Rushalka!"

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Side by side, Asya and Rushalka were flying at high speed, guarded by imperishable protection. These partners, whose hearts and minds were one, instantly took action to fulfill their mission.

"Let's decide the match before the princess accelerates. Magic



"How insolent—Hmm? Ohhh!?"

With the rapid increase in strain on her heart to produce magical power, Asya groaned in pain. Rushalka seemed to be suffering too, but even so, she still responded loyally to the witch's will.

Princess Yukikaze clicked her tongue—Then jumped in surprise.

Because Rushalka had instantly accelerated and used a new attack.

"Rushalka, double cast pseudo-divinity of Water!"

"Hmm. Freezing arrangement, I leave it to you!"

The blue wyvern produced a huge amount of "water" in the surroundings, pouring all of her magical power into it, turning the water into incomparably powerful pillars of water.

In other words, ultimate water cannons. However, Princess Yukikaze used the arrangement of "subzero freezing" to stop the water pillars—

All of the water turned into ice crystals.

Countless transparent flower-like crystals danced around the princess, Asya and Rushalka, adding glamor to this intense battlefield.

Asya's consecutive attacks were not over!

"O jailer of heavenly imprisonment and chain of the executioner—  
Complete your second mission!"

"Haha! Taking out the dragonslaying chain at last!"

Eight chains shot out from Rushalka's chin.

A technique of assured annihilation for killing dragons. The chains flew at Princess Yukikaze at high speed, aiming to tear her to pieces

---

The princess suddenly rushed upwards twenty meters.

The eight chains chased the princess and altered course. However, the princess' action was not to escape.

"I hereby decree to my emblem, the Arrow of Sirius... I, Yukikaze, will now transform into the dragonslaying arrow!"

Using a technique of assured annihilation as well, the princess descended swiftly.

The Rune of the Arrow appeared on the soles of the white dragon's feet to attack the eight chains like performing a flying kick. At that very moment...

"Rushalka, convert pseudo-divinity to the Moon!"

"What!?"

Asya shouted at the calculated moment, causing Princess Yukikaze to react in surprise again.

This was because Rushalka and the eight chains had merged with space. Governing darkness and illusions, the pseudo-divinity of the Moon possessed this ability too. Furthermore, to perform this move without even Princess Yukikaze noticing, only a master-class witch like Asya was this capable.

"Technique of assured annihilation. O jailer of heavenly imprisonment and chain of the executioner—Complete your mission!"

This time, she gambled everything and shot out the dragonslaying chain.

Only a single chain appeared from Rushalka's chin. It wrapped itself several times around Princess Yukikaze, depriving her of her freedom, tightly constricting her.

"Wow! Are you trying to seal my wings away!?"

The earlier attacks were all to lay the groundwork for this attack.

Repeated visual interference combined with diversionary movements to disrupt the enemy, then striking at a moment of guaranteed success. This attack was the culmination of the Shootdown Ace's experience and battle instincts that were as sharp as a wild beast's. Even a dragon king could not possibly defend against such a move.

Sure—

"Impossible!"

The chain tangled layer after layer, finally restraining Princess Yukikaze completely.

Asya began to descend at high speed with Rushalka. The blue wyvern held the chain in her teeth. Naturally, the princess was still securely bound by the chain.

"Hmm!"

The dragon king's massive body was descending together with them at supersonic speed.

Thirty thousand meters from ground level. Twenty thousand. Ten thousand. Five thousand. Three thousand—The urban wasteland below was a familiar sight.

"Rushalka, throw the princess—over there!"

Asya's finger was pointed to a Monolith.

A massive pitch-black tower. The landmark of the Old Tokyo Concession. An equilateral triangular prism standing as high as a thousand meters. Owned by Princess Yukikaze. During the aerial battle, Asya had been using Location Awareness to keep tabs on her position in the sky.

In fact, it did not matter where exactly she smashed the princess. However.

"There's a Monolith at Old Tokyo, and it also saves me the time of a return trip..."

Thus, Rushalka brought the dragon king wrapped in chain, dragged over here from an altitude of fifty thousand meters at Mach speed—and threw her downwards hard.

Smashed against the gigantic tower that was sturdier than every substance on Earth—the top of a Monolith.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!?"

The astounding impact finally caused Princess Yukikaze to howl.

It was almost evening in Japan, but the sun had yet to set on Tokyo in late summer. The sky was still quite bright.





## Part 6

The Moon's distance from the Earth was 1.283 light seconds.

In other words, it only took around 1.3 seconds at light speed to reach the lunar world thirty-seven thousand kilometers away. Only after becoming a spirit-only being did Hal finally know this.

"So I can move at light speed in this state, huh..."

He was deeply impressed.

Hal's mind was currently hovering at an altitude of 400 kilometers.

The same height as the International Space Station's orbit. Looking down, one could see the blue Pacific Ocean and the islands of Japan, as well as the eastern part of the Eurasian landmass.

"Impressive as ever, this secret technique invented by a dragon king. My capabilities are so great that ordinary ghosts and astral bodies can't compare at all."

On further thought, Hal currently possessed a complete heartmetal.

This was his greatest difference from the ghost Hinokagutsuchi.

"It's not surprising for my abilities to be better than her, who had lost her heartmetal..."

Using the same principle as how witches performed spirit body separation, he flew up in the sky.

He arrived in space in less than a second. Speaking of which, someone once said that "thoughts" were actually electrical currents in the brain.

In that case, the speed of thoughts, i.e. electrical currents, ought to be quite close to light speed.

"That being said, I currently don't even have a brain."

Hal grumbled while thanking Hazumi and Luna in his heart.

Backed into a corner, he had finally recovered his energy and magical power thanks to those two girls' help. He did not know how he could thank them enough.

"Also Asya—"

He needed to thank her too. His childhood friend was still fighting alone.

Facing a true dragon king, she and Rushalka remained resolute. Right now, they happened to have restrained the princess and landed in Tokyo.

Judging by this situation, she should be able to hold out a bit longer.

He must make preparations for a minimum counterattack during this time and hurry over to support Asya.

"Juujouji—"

Hal sent a magic eye to the Moon to check out the situation there.

From several hundred meters above, he looked down at the Plato crater. The magic symbol in the form of an infinity sign in the center of the crater was glowing golden.

The girl he loved was standing at the center of that glow.

Akuro-Ou, the white fox-wolf with a body length of ten-odd meters, was waiting by her side. As well as newborn life—

'Haruga-kun, you finally came.'

"Juujouji."

Orihime's thoughts were sent from the Moon.

In a short amount of time, Juujouji Orihime had obtained what witches would consider valuable experience. Just now, she had used the rune connection to sense Hal's position and transmit her thoughts

to Earth.

'I was really worried if you were truly gone this time.'

"I'm sorry. My body ended up falling completely apart."

'Evidently... You're capable of anything, and I don't know whether I should be relieved or worried about that.'

"Hahahaha."

Incredibly, simply receiving thoughts from the girl he loved made Hal feel as though his heart had been filled.

The key to recovering dragon kings and Tyrannoi who had strayed too far from human was probably this kind of fulfillment. Hal sincerely hoped he could turn back into a normal human as soon as possible.

However, he had to go save Asya first, and settle the match with Princess Yukikaze too.

Orihime had already prepared his trump card for him.

"Say, you really did it spectacularly."

Using the blessing obtained from the Rune of the Mother Dragon, Orihime had created a gigantic beast—

Still a dragon. Its body was a size bigger than Akuro-Ou, shining golden all over, gold with a faint tint of red.

A special radiance akin to the sun's own light.

However, this gold dragon's exterior was quite familiar to Hal. Except for the difference in color, it looked identical to the Crimson Queen.

'I based it on you and Kagutsuchi-san. Last time, didn't you two help me to create Akuro-Ou? I was wondering whether I could accomplish the same by borrowing help from the Rune of the Mother Dragon.'

"So you tried it."

'Yes. And in Sentai shows on Sunday mornings, whenever combining robots get destroyed, a new model always appears to turn crisis into opportunity.'

Orihime's thoughts were clearly filled with joy.

'We can use times like these for an upgrade event!'

"Those who enjoy hero stories tend to have pure and simple thoughts, it's nice. Thanks to you, I can do a return match straight away. But—"

Hal transmitted his thoughts from low Earth orbit to the Moon thirty thousand kilometers away.

Feeling that the other side was right in front of him, he grumbled emotionally.

"I totally have no idea how to beat Princess Yukikaze..."

'What does it matter?'

"Huh?"

'Sometimes you will come up with a plan halfway through, right? The more desperate you are, the more you'll rack your brain, which should allow you to devise tactics that you never thought of before.'

"That sounds very much like twisted logic, but it seems to make sense."

Haruga Haruomi was most likely the type that tended to over think.

Thorough preparations had brought him earlier successes, but he knew a long time ago that petty tricks were completely useless against Princess Yukikaze, a real dragon king.

Wing it. Take the plunge. Leave it to fate. Things will work out somehow.

Hal commanded himself to abandon the small-minded concept of "take responsibility for your own actions" and forced himself to emulate a man of grandeur.

He looked down at the blue planet that occupied his entire field of view.

When looking at the Earth from the Moon, the scale felt like "a blue ball far away" but Hal's current position was only four hundred thousand meters from the Earth, that *near*.

The planet that nurtured life was astoundingly large.

Confronted with a view that would change even an astronaut's outlook on life, Hal thought to himself.

*Given how huge the Earth is, I suppose a more destructive battle wouldn't be a problem, right?*

"I will follow your spirit and take the simple and obvious path. Lend me your power."

Hal used summoning magic while speaking.

This was a spell that elite dragons used to summon Raptors.

Next to Hal's spiritual form, a large number of glowing particles of light appeared, then materialized into the girl he missed very much.

"I waited so long for you, Haruga-kun!"

"Juujouji!"

Dressed in a school uniform, completely incongruent with the environment of space, Juujouji Orihime was smiling.



Undoubtedly the happiest smile in the whole world. Responding to Hal's summon, she had teleported here from the Moon.

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Akuro-Ou, the nine-tailed leviathan that had been born by Hal's hand, also materialized.

Furthermore, the white fox-wolf performed a deft somersault as soon as she appeared. Graceful and agile.

The gold dragon that had been born for the sake of this decisive battle also appeared—

"What should we call this child?"

"No time to ponder, let's just call her the Imitation. The Golden Imitation. She is my avatar, so this kind of knock-off name is a pretty good match."

The dragon created for Hal alone.

However, though the giant golden body looked quite sacred, the Imitation had no vitality in her eyes.

There was no soul in her body. Deciding it was time to let his golden avatar awaken, Hal materialized the Queen's heartmetal he had obtained from Minadzuki earlier.

The red metallic orb was sucked into the Imitation's chest, merging with her.

The Imitation's hollow eyes began to glow while the entire body started releasing red magical power.





## Part 7

Rushalka's fierce attack sent Princess Yukikaze colliding hard against the Monolith, a gigantic black tower.

Under normal conditions, this would have been a finishing move. The heavyweight impact caused even the princess to cry out in surprise.

"Chii—!"

After smashing against the top of the Monolith, the white dragon king did not fall to the ground.

She hovered briefly in the air, shook her head to wake up her hazy consciousness and muttered, "Well done, to think you managed to surprise me..."

"Only surprise, huh?"

Asya clicked her tongue.

How nostalgic to see the ground again, and Old Tokyo to boot. Asya decided she needed to find a place to land and picked the roof of a certain high-rise building, two hundred meters above ground.

She looked up towards Princess Yukikaze and the top of the Monolith  
—

Neither was harmed in the slightest.

For the princess, it was probably just "a little stunned."

The Monolith was unscathed. There was not even a nick on the black stone material. The structures created by dragon kings and dragonkind were all sturdy beyond common sense.

Even so, the Rune of the Chain continued to keep Princess Yukikaze restrained.

Just as Asya was about to command Rushalka to attack—

"Ugh... Ooooh—"

She felt intense pain in her heart.

Due to using magical power beyond her limit during the intense attack just now, she had subjected herself to massive strain. However, if only she held out a little longer—

"Rushahlka and I!"

*We can do it.* While Asya forcibly subjected herself to self-suggestion, she saw.

"Fufufufu. Your performance has surpassed my expectations."

With a pearly glow radiating from her body, the princess forcibly broke the dragonslaying chain that was wrapped many times around her.

With powerful strength, imperishable protection had broken the chain binding its master.

"O chain user, I, Yukikaze, must praise you a little. A mere greenhorn Tyrannos, to think you would earn a 'not bad' rating from me!"

"Guh...!"

Asya stopped flying and landed on the roof of a building.

Rushalka flapped her wings and stayed in the air, facing off against the white dragon king. She was already too exhausted to perform high-speed flight.

Also, Asya noticed.

Princess Yukikaze's severed left arm—Had already regenerated.

The tainted white dragon scales had recovered their luster, exhibiting beauty akin to white jade...

"The healing art finally took effect, huh?"

Princess Yukikaze commented gallantly.

"Although my right eye still cannot see... Fufufufu, it will recover sooner or later. I shall presently take on the dragonslaying arrow's form with full power."

The white dragon king narrowed her eyes, looking at Asya and Rushalka.

The blinded right eye had definitely not recovered yet. However, how much of a disadvantage would the loss of one eye present to a powerful warrior holding absolute superiority?

"She's definitely too strong for me to fight..."

Absolutely no way of winning. Asya felt that deeply.

Back when she was the Shootdown Ace, people kept praising her extraordinary inborn combat sense. Many people also described her talent as wild instinct.

During the series of attacking and defending maneuvers earlier, Asya had employed all her talent and experience.

The judgment that led her to realize she only had a chance in a quick battle and made the call to attack from afar, the superb skill allowing her to chain diverse attacks together, improvising them into a vicious tide of offense, and the mental strength that allowed her to draw out magical power beyond her limit through sheer force of will.

However, all this added together—

Still could not hurt a real dragon king.

"A mere Shootdown Ace is still too far from dragon king-class, huh..."

Her childhood friend would occasionally comment how he was not cut out to be a dragon king.

Asya painfully felt the same way.

Europe's former Shootdown Ace possessed a witch's power, battle experience, wild instinct, mental strength, judgment—Even with so much capability, she still could not surpass the enemy blocking in

front of her!

"I don't think I can beat her at all, even if I train for a hundred years, much less ten. I hate this feeling."

Escape was the only option. Both instinct and reason were warning Asya.

Beasts would not continue fighting a war with no chance of winning. Neither would smart soldiers. Asya was approaching her limit.

Even so.

She still could not escape.

"I can no longer shamelessly claim to avenge Haruomi, but at least, I have to connect one attack...!"

"Fufufufu. O chain user, your fighting spirit is not bad. However, it is not fresh enough to make me want to savor it carefully."

"...Kuh..."

"At least, I, Yukikaze, shall bury you with my trump card."

From the ferocious white dragon's mouth came a gentle voice.

The instant Asya looked up in alarm, Princess Yukikaze had already flown high up with great speed, making herself look as small as a seed.

"Technique of assured annihilation!?"

The mystic technique of turning oneself into a dragonslaying arrow to charge in a straight line.

Not too long ago, the princess had used the same move against Rushalka. But right now, her speed, altitude and vigor were clearly different from that time.

Asya stared wide-eyed. Princess Yukikaze was finally serious—

"Rushalka! Defending is useless no matter how much magical power

you use! Run away desperately if you want to live!"

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Blue Rushalka cried out mournfully, responding to Asya's reflexively issued order.

Until now, she had stayed near the top of the Monolith—The air at an altitude of a thousand meters, letting her wings rest.

Right now, she spread both wings wide and started to glide, borne by wind from the ground, spurring her utterly exhausted body to flee.

Perhaps this was foolish behavior, merely postponing death from five seconds later to fifteen seconds later.

However, if she could stall for thirty seconds or so, she and Rushalka would be able to counterattack the princess with a strike during that time...!

'No! Do not flee, Asya-san!'

In that instant, Asya heard her friend's voice.

No, not a voice. They were thought waves coming from outside of Earth.

'Hold your position. Trust us!'

"Orihime-san!?"

The instant she received the thought waves—

Asya commanded Rushalka to make an emergency stop. For the very first time in her life, she ignored her judgment as an outstanding warrior and changed her mind, choosing to trust her companion instead.

Rushalka swiftly braked, interrupting full-speed flight, thus managing to stop with great effort.

0.1 seconds later, the white dragon king descended like a shooting

star. Practically at the same time, something flashed in the eastern sky.

"O miracle of lightning, let Yukikaze transform into the dragonslaying arrow!"

"Rushalka, do not move under any circumstance!"

'I am counting on you, Akuro-Ou, use the flashing cross slash! The princess will definitely descend in a straight line, so just fly over to the spot slightly above Rushalka!'

A second before Princess Yukikaze, turned into the dragonslaying arrow, collided with Rushalka...

A flash of light dashed over from the eastern sky and intersected with Princess Yukikaze.

Juujouji Orihime's partner, Akuro-Ou, had flown over at light speed.

The white nine-tailed fox-wolf horizontally swung the larger blade in her right tail while the smaller blade held in her left tail chopped downwards, thus manifesting the Rune of the Twin Katana.

The two blades drew a cross shape in the air, practically a cross-shaped slash at light speed—

Orihime had asked Rushalka not to move in order to predict the princess' path of descent!

"Nu... Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"

'A-Akuro-Ou!?'

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?

The outcome of the clash between the dragonslaying arrow and the cross-shaped slash was that both sides were deflected.

Wielding the twin katana, Akuro-Ou crashed directly into the ruins of Old Tokyo. Princess Yukikaze calmly stopped herself in the air.

The damage was probably similar to smashing her against the Monolith.

The princess laughed with joy using her dragon body.

"Hahahaha! I, Yukikaze, see it now, the emblem of the twin katana cross star!"

'Ooh. I cannot believe it did not result in a one-hit kill even when I took pains to bluff just now.'

Juujouji Orihime's ashamed voice was heard.

Next to Asya who had landed on a building's roof, shining glowing particles of light appeared, then materialized into the form of the Japanese witch.

The holder of the Twin Katana had probably used teleportation magic to let her return to Earth.

"Orihime-san, so Haruomi is still alive after all...!?"

"Yes, he ended up surviving. He asked me to pass a message to you—"

"Ohh, what is this!?"

Before Asya had a chance to get details, Princess Yukikaze cried out in surprise.

Stopped in midair, the white dragon king looked up to the sky in great surprise. An excessively giant crystal of light had suddenly appeared in the air over the Old Tokyo Concession.

And it was falling extremely quickly—!

"A giant meteor!? If something like that crashed into Tokyo...!?"

"Haruga-kun said he was aiming at the princess. There won't be a problem, I hope?"

"Uh, so Haruomi is responsible!?"

Hearing Orihime's explanation, Asya was left speechless.

The rapidly descending mass of light was like a comet crashing to the ground.

It probably hurtled from outside the atmosphere. Estimated speed was more than thirty kilometers per second, which would be a hundred Mach or so. The second cosmic velocity for escaping the Earth's gravity was 33 Mach, so this object had effortlessly achieved three times of that...

Meanwhile, Princess Yukikaze saw the suddenly descending flash of light and was overjoyed.

"I sense it. The Rune of the Bow—the presence of my fated rival! Fufufufu. I knew it, Haruomi is certainly talented at pleasing me!"

Princess Yukikaze did not even look at the two witches and the two leviathans.

The graceful dragon king flew up in the air. Was she trying to head into space again, to have another duel between the dragonslaying runes of the Arrow and the Bow?

"True, I suppose our level is too low to fight her..."

"Nothing of that sort."

Asya went "hmp" and grumbled unhappily, whereas Juujouji Orihime's radiant smile was reminiscent of summer sunshine.

"It is all thanks to you, Asya-san, for bringing the princess to Tokyo, that Haruga-kun was able to make it in time and prepare that thing."

"What is Haruomi planning to do?"

Looking at the ominous sky, Asya cocked her head in puzzlement.

The mysterious glow was bright enough to illuminate all of Old Tokyo, which used to form the heart of Japan. Next, it was gradually crashing to the ground.

Like an arrow, Princess Yukikaze rapidly shot up towards the light—



"This really looks like *Independence Day* or a 'the sky is falling!' colony drop attack. I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Haruga-kun called it 'Operation Spirit Bomb'."

"Huh?"

"Just now, he was still in space—it's called satellite orbit, right? Around there, he was shouting dialog like 'everyone, share your spirit energy with me!'"

"....."

Just to err on the side of caution, Asya inquired about the detailed plan from Orihime.

"If anything goes wrong, that move could cause a crisis that destroys the Earth. Is Haruomi simply giving up because the enemy is too strong?"

Asya muttered quietly.



## Part 8

Ideally, things should be done with minimum effort.

In addition, it would be best to maximize gains.

This was Haruga Haruomi's guiding philosophy. After meeting up with Orihime, he looked down at the Earth from satellite orbit, an altitude of four hundred kilometers.

He suddenly thought, "Eh? Isn't this a perfect opportunity?"

No, calm contemplation made him realize. There were too many problems with this plan of action. The slightest misstep and he might end up being the man who destroyed civilization on Earth.

However, if there was no way of winning against the dragon kings unless he went this far—

"Sigh... All I can do is take a gamble. If we don't persevere to the end, the humans of Earth will have no path but extinction."

Follow your feelings and go crazy to your heart's content.

Using President M's message as his scapegoat, Hal issued the first command to the golden imitator Queen.

"Use the Ruruk Soun runes of 'telekinesis' and gather up all the satellite and meteor fragments floating in the Earth's vicinity. Like 'everyone, share your spirit energy with me!'"

The wisdom of Ruruk Soun was a prized repository of mystic rituals and ultimate techniques—

Among them, "telekinesis" would be considered extremely basic magic. But for Hal right now, this was the most effective spell.

"Let's make a scene using 'Operation Spirit Bomb!'"

After he had explained the essentials of the plan to Orihime and

transported her to Earth to support Asya...

The golden imitation Queen used telekinesis to gather up space trash such as satellite and meteor fragments to the same location—

The result was "a ball scrap metal and rock roughly ten kilometers in diameter."

The Imitation seemed to have great potential, seeing as she was able to accomplish so much in such short time. That being said, Hal had heard before that the Earth's vicinity contained as much trash as several thousand tons, so abundance of material was one reason. (Of course, he excluded the inhabited International Space Station as a target for collection.)

When Hal used the Rune of the Bow on it...

The Gold Imitation responded to his will summoned a golden longbow into her left hand.

"Let's go, technique of assured annihilation. The arrow... is the scrap metal you gathered!"

Uuuuuuuuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The Gold Imitation roared loudly.

In front of them was a rough sphere with a diameter of ten kilometers—a mass of scrap metal and rocks.

Namely, an improvised meteor compressed using telekinesis.

Using bow-wielding left arm, the Imitation struck this gigantical artificial object hard. Heartmetal output was raised to the maximum, pouring magical power into it without any reservation.

"As long as I all of the Imitation's and my power to shoot this thing down from satellite orbit!"

The destructive power ought to surpass the sun-shooting divine bow...!

The artificial meteor's surface became covered by "the tilted half-moon," in other words, the symbol of the Rune of the Bow, and crashed towards the Earth.

At first, its motion was quite slow, but the meteor soon began to gather speed.

The planned impact point was Princess Yukikaze who had been taken to the Old Tokyo Concession.

"A meteor that might have caused the dinosaurs to go extinct sixty-five million years ago—I remember its diameter was around fifteen kilometers or so."

Hal dug out this piece of trivia from a corner of his brain.

"This meteor's size is pretty close to that, so I guess the destructive power would be similar..."

It was one of many theories about the cause of the dinosaurs going extinct.

The meteor had crashed in the Yucatan Peninsula, resulting in a gigantic crater and sending a huge amount of sand and dust into the air. This state of affairs persisted for at least a decade, even blocking out sunlight, causing dramatic changes to the entire Earth's climate and ecosystems, plunging the dinosaurs in famine.

Even if less serious than that, with this meteor so big, a crash would probably cause an astounding impact on the sky and earth—

"But... Princess Yukikaze will definitely intercept it."

Hal was very sure.

He used this plan because he understood the princess' personality and extraordinary abilities.

"Oh right—This counts as a technique of assured annihilation invented by me, right? In that case, I'll name it 'the bow of human extinction' or something like that..."

Mid-sentence, Hal realized he really stood a chance of terminating mankind, and felt deeply awkward about it.

He paid attention to the meteor's movement.

The artificial meteor crashed into the atmosphere and began to burn. In a few minutes, it was going to smash hard into the ground at the Old Tokyo Concession, devastating eastern Asia with terrifying destructive power.

"So it really is coming!?"

"To you would use such a large-scale attack for my sake—Praiseworthy, Haruomi!"

Princess Yukikaze flew up.

Releasing white magical power, her flight was the very image of a rising dragon.

No rocket, no matter how advanced, could compare to her. The princess' speed easily exceeded the second cosmic velocity required to escape the Earth's gravity, and the third cosmic velocity required to escape the sun's gravity. Her speed increased every 0.1 second—Currently reaching roughly fifty kilometers per second.

Far faster than the falling artificial meteor.

This was the full power and top speed of the dragon king who had transformed into the dragonslaying arrow!

"H-How is such speed possible!?"

With wide-eyed amazement, Hal looked down from an altitude of four hundred thousand meters.

Far below, roughly sixty or seventy kilometers above ground—the area before the stratosphere—the ultimate bow and the ultimate arrow finally collided with great force.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

"Oooh. As expected of the princess, she singlehandedly pushed back the meteor..."

The artificial meteor fired by the Imitation's bow could be considered a mass-based weapon.

A diameter around ten kilometers. Its fall was powered not only by the Rune of the Bow but also the power of gravity. The pure white draogn king had blocked it singlehandedly, pushing it back to space!

Furthermore, the princess herself was the "dragonslaying arrow."

An energy body that utterly smashed everything it came into contact with, even capable of slaying dragons.

Simply colliding with the princess already caused the falling artificial meteor to start crumbling. At this rate, it was going to to explode in midair sooner or later. Just as Hal had predicted.

"Causing human extinction would be pretty bad..."

He did not care if the artificial meteor got destroyed.

However, when it exploded, it would definitely catch Princess Yukikaze in the blast. At this moment, Juujouji Orihime should be asking Hal's childhood friend for a favor, to borrow the tool needed for this situation.

"It's here!"

A magic symbol similar to the "㊦" character appeared on the back of Hal's right hand.

The was the Rune of the Chain lent to him by Asya from Earth. This was just like the time when he had borrowed the Rune of the Sword from his fellow Tyrannos, the silver dragon Pavel Galad.

"Imitation! In the instant of the explosion, use the dragonslaying chain to bind Princess Yukikaze. Otherwise, she might escape using her extraordinary speed!"

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The Gold Imitation roared deeply in response. Her left hand was holding a golden bow, while the remaining right hand manifested a counterweighted chain that was akin to a live snake craning its neck.

Hal finally finished laying his trap of assured victory. Just as he nodded...

He heard the proud voice of the girl who was supposed to be somewhere else.

"Hahahaha! Sure enough, Haruomi is different from the others!"

The magic surfboard was flying over with lighting speed.

Aiming for the bow and chain wielding Imitation's face, the surfboard's front end collided with the golden snout with a "clong!"

Quite a powerful blow. The Imitation's massive body was sent flying hard.

"Stop!"

Hal—more precisely, Hal in astral form—used telekinesis to halt the Imitation.

In the zero gravity environment of space, it was anyone's guess how far one would fly as a result of such an impact. However, the Gold Imitation apparently took substantial damage. She did not move.

Unconscious. One-hit knock out.

"That move was the dragonslaying arrow too... Amazing."

"Fufufufu. I, Yukikaze, is the one who wants to praise you for being amazing. The power of your dragonslaying bow is astounding."

The magic surfboard flew to just before Hal's astral form.

On it was the girl in a white one-piece dress. Just like several hours earlier, this was Princess Yukikaze's human form, again separated from her dragon form.



"I forgot you had this move too..."

"You have apparently learned new tricks."

Princess Yukikaze narrowed her eyes, because Hal immediately materialized his own body, using the same principle as how he materialized on Earth.

Below was a magnificent sight, the Earth's landmasses and blue oceans—

Hal and the Princess Yukikaze faced off.

"Because I can't be treated as an evil spirit and get sent to the afterlife just yet."

"I am surprised you thought up something like that. But conversely... It means I can do this."

Whoosh. Princess Yukikaze's human form jumped down from the surfboard.

Jumping through the air with agile movements like a fairy dance, she kicked Hal from the side. Hal wondered if she had used flight magic to execute combat moves in zero gravity.

"Uwah!?"

"Oh? You are quite amazing."

Hal reflexively used imperishable protection to guard himself. He also used telekinesis immediately to halt his body, which almost got kicked to the other side of the universe.

However, what awaited him was the princess' smile and follow up attack.

The ferocious girl of white again danced with fairy-like agile movements, swiftly closing in.

Just like that, she grabbed Hal's shoulder with her slender left hand, then attacked Hal with a karate chop from her right.

"Take this barehanded strike that can shatter a winged lizard's skull!"

"Woahhhhhh!"

Hal used telekinesis on both hand, trying to intercept the dragonslaying karate chop.

What a close shave. However, the artificial meteor and Princess Yukikaze's dragon form were currently colliding in the Earth's atmosphere. The time of the great explosion was gradually approaching.

Probably two or three minutes remaining...

"Damn it! It wasn't easy holding out this long!"

Holding the princess' knifehand with both of his hands, Hal felt poignantly.

He was corneered. Haruga Haruomi had no chance of winning anymore. Princess Yukikaze probably understood this and said with delight, "Fufufufu. For a Tyrannos who cannot become a dragon king, you have done very well. You deserve praise from me."

"Ooh. You're totally saying that with condescension!"

However, Hal could not refute her at all.

The advice given to him before the battle lingered in his mind.

'No matter how many cheap tricks you pull out, struggling like a pathetic rat to bite the cat to death, your teeth will never tear into a berserk dragon king's throat.'

'As much as possible, avoid fighting fair and square.'

'Follow your feelings and go crazy to your heart's content!'

*Don't tell me*—Only now did Hal start feeling regret.

Originally, he had kept to unorthodoxy and the ambush approach, but in the end, he slipped again into fighting "fair and square."

However, Hal could not think of any strategy more crazy than this...

"By the way, Haruomi, I believe I have told you this."

"Huh? Told me what?"

Hal and Princess Yukikaze were still locked in their postures in the barehanded struggle.

As a result, their faces were very close with only thirty centimeters between them. Hence, Hal could admire the princess' snow fairy-like beautiful face from up close.

"If you're fortunate enough to survive, you shall become mine."

"Why were trying to send me straight to the afterlife earlier despite saying that!?"

"I could not help myself. Forgive me. Forgive Yukikaze and take this attack without a fuss. If you are fortunate enough to survive..."

"End of conversation! This is an endless repeat!"

Although he still had the princess' karate chop clamped, his hands and telekinesis were reaching their limit.

The knifehanded strike gradually came closer. Hal's arms were out of strength, but he used his remaining willpower to squeeze out telekinesis, deflecting the karate chop to the side slightly.

THanks to that, the view of the princess' adorable face became even clearer...

"Besides! Why do you have to keep harassing me every time!? Even if I hold the Rune of the Bow, it's not like I have any direct relationship with you!"

By this point, there was no need to hold back anymore. Hence, Hal grumbled without reserve against the adorable king.

"Why can't you leave me alone!?"

"What are you talking about? I, Yukikaze, am so interested in you."

The great dragon king looked quite surprised.

"I, Yukikaze, hope that you would obediently kneel before me and swear eternal fealty to me."

"Then recruit me properly! Don't just dangle half-baked treats in front of me, but end up forcing me to get killed by you!"

"That is because I am displeased by your indecisive manner."

The princess went "hmph," looking a little offended.

"You ought to be more resolute and dignified. However, you did quite well earlier, when you brought up for the first time what would happen if you were to defeat me."

"Oh? That?"

Hal remembered he had something quite rude to Princess Yukikaze went he got carried away in the mood.

Something like "a promise that already assumes I'm gonna lose is outrageous. In case you lose, what are you going to offer me."

He was very surprised that the princess actually liked this kind of attitude.

"Yes, it is quite manly. Regrettably, I hoped you would add to that 'If I win, I will take the princess as my minion'."

"Hmm—I'm not good at dealing with stuff like that."

"Naturally, I, Yukikaze, understand that is how your personality is. Nevertheless, I believe it wouldn't hurt for you to be more forceful back then."

"Why?"

"I do not know how to answer that. However, it will be more to my liking if you acted that way."

"Uh, meaning you'll like me more?"

"Yes."

Eh? What was with this conversation?

Hal was totally lost, and banished to the back of his mind the matters of the princess' barehanded chop and the artificial meteor that was about to explode.

Could it be possible that she harbored a certain level of affection for him? No, the princess herself seemed totally unaware too.

If he exploited this situation with determination and forcefulness, perhaps he could easily—

(However, wouldn't that interpretation be a bit too narcissistic of me...? Kind of like a boy in puberty, baited by a girl's unintentional actions, finally ending up in ruin—)

Hal's self-control overruled his deduction.

However, Princess Yukikaze's face was right before his eyes, frowning in puzzlement. She was probably feeling the same sense of dissonance as Hal's from the conversation just now.

The otherworldly beautiful maiden dragon king did not look displeased as a result of this—

(Since I'm destined to lose to the princess no matter what... In that case.)

He might as well muster his courage and go crazy.

Hal committed his resolve and brought his face close to Princess Yukikaze.



"H-Haruomi...!?"

The princess tried to speak but he sealed her mouth with his lips.

This was a historical moment, a kiss between the successors of the Bow and the Arrow, between the imitation dragon king and the genuine dragon king.

Next, the artificial meteor below exploded spectacularly near the Earth's surface.

Normally speaking, Princess Yukikaze's dragon form should have flown away at full speed, to avoid getting caught in the blast.

However, possibly because her human form's mind was blanked out by Hal's kiss—

The white dragon king's massive body did not engage her prided super speed, and was completely swallowed by the perfectly timed explosion...





# **Chapter 5 - The World Thereafter**

# Part 1

Almost a year and a half had gone by since the great battle that took place outside of Earth.

It was early March. Tokyo New Town had just entered the spring season. The weather still seesawed between warm and cold while true spring gradually approached, day by day.

On this afternoon...

The witch Shirasaka Hazumi got off from school early.

The middle school division of Kogetsu Academy was nearing graduation, hence there were only morning lessons.

Hazumi did not return home immediately. Instead, she remained in uniform as she traveled alone to Higashikomagata station of the New Town Loop Line.

In front of the station, she entered an unassuming mixed tenant building. She passed by establishments such as a curry shop, a cafe, a massage parlor and a DVD shop before entering the glass door of Mirokudou, a used bookstore on the fourth floor...

"Hello, it's been a while. May I ask if it is alright for me to intrude right now?"

"Oh of course. As you can see, we're open for business right now with practically no customers. Stay for as long as you wish."

Hazumi greeted the shopkeeper behind the counter as soon as she stepped into the store.

The young man had stubble despite his handsome face and was dressed in a creased white shirt. The black apron, part of store attire, was also dirty. His name was Kenjou.

He used to be employed at the Tokyo Branch of the research organization SAURU.

Currently, he was the premier instructor at the Tokyo main office of GUILD, a civilian security company.

"By the way, this lady here apparently has no intention of contributing to the store's sales. Be my guest, have a chat with her."

"It's not my fault. Who asked this store to carry such extreme genres?"

The only female customer replied to Kenjou.

She was wearing glasses and dressed tidily in a suit. Her makeup and attire belonged to style of women in their twenties, thus presenting a very youthful impression. However, she was probably not the right customer for this hardcore and a little filthy used bookstore, which carried not a single comic book.

Hiiragi Yukari. Back when she worked at the research organization SAURU, she had looked after Hazumi with care.

Now, she was the head of the human resources department at the Tokyo main office of the civilian security company GUILD—

"From what I have heard, Hazumi-san, lately your health has improved from before, hasn't it?"

"Yes. After that incident with Princess Yukikaze... and Senpai, my health has been getting better and better." Hazumi recalled the commotion on that night, something she had not thought about for a long time now, and replied.

"Asya-senpai says it might be because my health used to be poor because my heart and mind were unaccustomed to a witch's power the whole time. But after Minadzuki awakened goddess power, the strain on me seems to have lessened a lot."

"I see..."

Hiiragi-san nodded.

"So in the end, that night was a turning point for you too, Hazumi-san, not just the world."

On a certain summer night, a mysterious magic symbol had appeared in an obvious manner on the full moon.

In addition, a large dragon and several leviathans had fought, using low Earth orbit as the stage for an intense and haphazard battle.

Finally, there was a mysterious meteor that almost crashed into Tokyo, but exploded in the stratosphere—

That night was named the "Full Moon Nightmare" incident. The media in every country competed to report on it. Nowadays, there was almost no one who did not know about it.

There was a dramatic change in the world's relationship with magic, with the night of the nightmare as the turning point.

"After that, SAURU's business and staff in Tokyo New Town and the Kantou region... were all taken over by our civilian enterprise, GUILD," commented the young Mr. Kenjou poignantly, probably because it stirred up deep feelings in his heart.

"Synthesizing leviathans, supporting various witches, devising strategy against dragon activity, on-site combat command, as well as serving as communication channels between various involved parties. Oh man, we expected the new faction GUILD to succeed easily as long as SAURU lacked the dragonbane advantage, but—"

"We never expected to win over contracts with all autonomous organizations across Japan not long after establishing GUILD for a year. How surprising..."

Even Hiiragi-san was in awe. Hazumi laughed.

"*Smith*-san was grinning when he said this was the matter-of-fact result."

"Clearly he is a weirdo for liking such a comedic name."

"Yes, the most surprising is our CEO after all... Oh right. I remember today is when the show airs! Kenjou-kun, could you turn on the television!?"

"I'm on it, boss lady."

Young Mr. Kenjou was actually older, but he was Hiiragi-san's subordinate in rank.

He replied respectfully as always and placed a portable LCD television on the counter, then turned it on and changed channel to show an afternoon variety show.

"Today, we have as our guest, the representative of the much talked about company GUILD. Welcome, John Smith Haruga-san to our studio~!"

The female announcer introduced in a cheerful voice.

"Oh? Looks like it happens to be his turn now."

"L-Luna-san is there too!?"

"I requested for Miss Gregory to provide support on the side as part of marketing. Think about this. Although our representative's abilities and social skills are so high that we have no choice but to admit defeat, his knowledge of common sense in the human world is still not enough..."

The three of them stared at the small television together.

Just then, the host and the female announcer was preparing to invite "today's guest" to enter the show's talk corner segment.

The television showed a closeup shot of the guest sitting on the sofa.

It was a red-haired man whose muscular physique was obvious even through the screen.

He was dressed as a businessman of sorts, in a suit, but crimson in color. His white shirt had the top two buttons unfastened and he did not wear a tie. Based on attire alone, one might think he looked more like he worked at a host club.

Furthermore, he was openly crossing his legs in front of the camera.

This arrogant attitude and gaudy clothing would most likely earn criticism in normal situations.

However, who knew if it was because of his natural charm or royal charisma...

Mr. John Smith Haruga, the representative of the civilian security company GUILD, was rising in popularity all over Japan and the internet world.

For some reason, his exaggerated yet natural speech and behavior was quite well liked. 'I am John Smith Haruga, the CEO of this company GUILD. Today, I'd like to explain to you all what role my company plays in Japan's new anti-dragon defense plans, as well as its significance.'

After saying this with a tense expression, he grinned mischievously and added, 'Oh. I welcome personal questions through email or fax. You can even send them directly to the GUILD, and I will answer them later. But let me be clear, it will depend on availability of time and staff.'

This grinning brawny man looked around thirty or forty years old.

However, his actual age was maybe thousands or tens of thousands of years. Age indeterminate, in any case. Only very few people knew his other name.

The Flame Emperor. Red Hannibal. The dragon king himself who had conquered New York.

"Phew."

After the show, he returned to the room that television crew had prepared for him to rest.

When Luna Francois was the only one present with him, Hannibal said contentedly, 'Today's show was quite interesting. This broadcast media called 'television' is quite a good match for one such as I after all.'

"I think so too. But I think it's a bit dangerous to go on shows."

Extremely naturally, Hannibal slipped back into referring to himself as "one such as I."

Luna calmly responded to the dragon king who possessed social skills one would not expect from a dragon. Though she normally preferred dressing up in Gothic lolita, today she was wearing a black suit.

"Fufufufu. You should turn a blind eye to that. So-called combat instinct is accumulated through actual experience. And isn't it because I devote so much effort to promotional activities that GUILD has taken control of Japan's defense network in only a year's time?"

"Plan out, not take control." Luna corrected Hannibal's brutally honest choice of words.

However, she did not correct the content of what he was saying. Unlike SAURU, which was originally a secret association, GUILD's policy was to boldly disclose information to Japan and the entire world. In other words, they widely publicized the fact that only witches and leviathans were capable of fighting dragons, and that GUILD was the organization devoted to using, researching and popularizing them.

By spreading knowledge far and wide, the number of people wanting to become witches would increase.

A greater pool of candidates would make it easier to find the talented ones. Increasing the number of excellent witches would promote competition and interaction between witches, thereby raising overall quality naturally.

Hence, they made the decision to publicize information.

That being said, the policy remained of withholding from the public the existence of elite dragons and dragon kings with the high intelligence and potent magic.

In addition, regarding knowledge of dragonslaying runes, the policy was "it was okay to tell new witches if they actively asked" and give the standardized answer "secret techniques akin to finishing moves

that only certain leviathans are capable of using" without hiding much in particular, because—

Juujouji Orihime, Shirasaka Hazumi, Luna Francois, Asya, as well as Haruga Haruomi—

One of GUILD's objectives was to slowly increase their members from this small permanent lineup.

"Still... I never thought we'd ask the great dragon king of New York to take on this kind of job."

"Indeed. I am deeply surprised too."

Hannibal chuckled "hohoho."

The decisive battle against Princess Yukikaze happened a year and a half ago. There was no winner, and after the battle ended with the princess' complete surrender—

The plan to establish the civilian security company GUILD entered the execution stage.

At that point, they hired New York's Red Hannibal to serve as their consultant.

Reportedly, Hannibal had already entered into a private contract with Haruga Haruomi to establish a "Trans-Pacific Alliance" between Tokyo and North America to support each other. This was in consideration of a diplomatic strategy against the pure-blooded dragon kings whom they had yet to meet but may encounter eventually—The Black Lightning Emperor and the Blue Sea King.

Because compared to a pure warrior race, a human dragon king was more suitable as an ally.

Hannibal was quite interested in Haruga Haruomi's suggestion, but he added a condition. He might consider it if he could take Old Tokyo from Princess Yukikaze's possession—

Hence, the dragon king of New York became GUILD's ally.



He actively enjoyed this situation, taking on human form to visit Tokyo New Town, and even showed up frequently for meetings.

Thanks to him, not only the witches but even ordinary company staff knew him as the "mysterious Japanese-American man of mixed ethnicity, John Smith Haruga." People outside of GUILD, such as Tokyo New Town's metropolitan governor and city councilors, key persons in business sponsors, all knew of him.

That being said, apart from Haruga Haruomi's inner circle, no one knew his true identity.

It was at that time that a question popped up.

Very well, who was going to be the company's boss?

Founder Haruga Haruomi claimed "I'm not suited as leader, and I have after-effects to deal with, so count me out. Pick a witch and let her be the high school girl CEO." Asya and Luna said "it's definitely better to choose someone Japanese." The Japanese-born witches also said "find someone a bit older..."

A certain member of staff randomly suggested "Why not have Mr. Smith take the job?"

There was virtually no opposition.

Important people outside of GUILD who learned of this news (mainly Orihime's grandfather, etc) all gave active support.

Even though his resume was a little suspicious, compared to "the high schooler who somehow became a treasure hunter with deep knowledge of dragonkind's magic" and "the world's top-class witches, but they are high school girls," ultimately the preferred leader was an adult man in his prime—That was what conservative commoners tended to think.

The main point was that the man who returned from America, calling himself John Smith Haruga, definitely exhibited human charisma that satisfied such thinking.

Project leader Haruga Haruomi finally reached a conclusion.

'Our goal is not limited to Tokyo but to expand our business across all of Japan as well as the entire Trans-Pacific area. I've been thinking since a while ago, for this purpose, we need a representative who can serve as a mascot and go on television all the time. Mr. Hannibal might be a great choice as long as he's willing to do it.'

When they asked Hannibal, he immediately answered "Leave it to me."

Thus, the CEO who devoted himself full time to promotional activities without taking part in running the company (more precisely, he was not authorized to participate) was born.

Time went by—

Effective use of the CEO's qualities in promotional activities.

Possession of multiple master-class leviathans capable of effortlessly defeating large dragons that were more dangerous than Raptors, who had also played key roles in the "Full Moon Nightmare" incident.

An attitude of explaining magic and the metaphysical body of knowledge in simple terms.

Perhaps thanks to all of these advantages, the civilian security company GUILD expanded with rapid growth beyond expectation, to the current day...

The nominal leader said solemnly, "The path to happiness is fraught with hardship. The enemy I should be most wary of right now is the legendary weekly magazine *Sentence Spring*, I suppose? The conqueror from dragonkind and dragon king in New York, the leader of a startup of rising prominence in Japan—They must not find out about this spectacular double life."

"Normal people wouldn't think of this possibility, it's not like we're talking Arsene Lupin here."

A triple life as a gentleman thief / Russian noble / policeman.

Luna named the superhuman who was capable of handling these multiple surreal missions simultaneously.

"Actually, I think your resume fraud is the easiest to get caught."

"My latest academic qualification is at Harvard Business School, right?"

"However, I used my connections to have someone help make arrangements in America, so I don't expect it to be exposed so easily. That human form, which you've shown to the Governor of New York, apparently has been classified as top secret by the US government, on the same level as Area 51."

"Excellent... Oh, by the way, where is that guy?"

"Harry?"

"Yes. I expected my nominal nephew would surely visit the studio today."

Hannibal's newest alias, John Smith Haruga.

The backstory was that he was Haruga Haruomi's uncle.

Luna shrugged and said, "That is the plan, yes, but today, Harry's chronic ailment seems to have flared up again, so he didn't even go to school and is resting at home."

"Oh?"



## Part 2

Well then—

The duel against Princess Yukikaze was a year and a half ago.

Even now, Hal still did not believe he was the winner.

However, with that incident as the trigger, "Princess Yukikaze's complete surrender!" became reality, and Haruga Haruomi's new life began too. This was the truth, no doubt about it.

In addition, there were occasional flare ups of a chronic ailment, troubling Hal—

During the duel with the princess, Hal had used the technique that Hinokagutsuchi had taught him directly to turn into astral form. However, he had also learned magic for materializing his body.

Nowadays, Hal was using a "temporary body" to live out his daily life.

Eating, going to school, working at GUILD, fighting dragons, sleeping. Despite being a temporary body, it was still capable of doing most things well. However—

"Hmm—"

When he woke up this morning, Hal found himself transformed to astral form.

No, more precisely, he had "reverted to astral form." This chronic ailment would flare up regularly.

"My body has become both convenient and inconvenient..."

Sure enough, astral form was his default state.

Three or four times a month, he would suddenly become unable to sustain a corporeal body. At times like these, he had to spend roughly half a day in astral form, unable to materialize unless he waited a

while. Today, it happened again in the morning.

Hence, Hal used the spell of "transmit my voice yonder" to inform his acquaintances that he needed an emergency break.

Then in astral form, he went for a random stroll in the sky.

"I guess I'll head home. I'm tired of wandering outside."

His current altitude was almost 200 meters. Under him was the blue-green South Sea, stretching endlessly to the horizon in the distance. He was hovering aimlessly in the sky over the Pacific Ocean quite close to Australia.

"Still, it's thanks to this body that I'm no longer turning into a dragon."

More correctly, "this is a temporary body, hence every time I switch to a new one, the dragonification symptoms reset."

"Here I... go."

With just a thought, he instantly returned to the entrance of his home at Tokyo New Town.

In astral form, he could even reach space in one or two seconds.

This level of elusive mobility was as easy as eating or breathing to him. Hal directly phased through the door and walls to enter his bed in the bedroom.

"Let me take a nap to kill time until I can materialize..."

He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

After two hours or so, someone whispered in his ear.

(Haruomi... Haruomi...)

"Mmm—"

Half asleep, Hal answered in a vague voice. And ended up getting scolded.

(Haruomi, get up. Your wife came to pay you a special visit.)

"But... My usual ailment... I can't materialize for now..."

(No. Enough time should have passed. The wife is never wrong, okay? Haruomi, show me your mettle.)

"Mm... But... I want to stay in bed longer..."

By this point, Hal still tried to resist.

"GUILD is already on track, my work has lessened quite a bit... I was thinking it's time for me to take a long break and go on a vacation for the time being..."

(Fool. Didn't we already decide that if you are going to take a break, we will go on a trip together?)

"Oh..."

(Know that I, Yukikaze, am paying you a special visit precisely to go on a honeymoon with you, got that?)

"No no no. We were saying next week..."

(In any case, get up now. I desire to have a pillow talk with you, my beloved husband, to whisper sweet nothings to each other. Get up get up get up get up.)

Though the princess was sulking, she had no intention of rousing Hal by force. She kept whispering softly in Hal's ear.

Hal felt poignantly this was part of the princess' cuteness.

He finally made his body materialize.

Princess Yukikaze's judgment was spot on, flawless.

Thus, even though the sun was up, Haruga Haruomi was still in bed, face to face with a beautiful young maiden—Princess Yukikaze dressed in a white summer dress.

"...Hi."

"Fufufufu. You should be saying something more pleasing, Haruomi."

Despite grumbling, Princess Yukikaze softly drew her face nearer.

She approached the face of the sleepy-eyed Hal. Very near. Thus, she kissed Hal. A sudden kiss. Morning kiss. And not only once.

Under the same blanket as Hal, the princess mounted him.

Smooch. Smooch smooch smooch smooch smooch smooch.

Without saying anything, she kissed Hal again and again.

"A-Aren't you being a bit too passionate?"

"What are you talking about? When we were facing off in the sky, the one who took Yukikaze's lips by force—these virgin lips that Yukikaze had never allowed any man to touch... Isn't that you?"

The princess spoke softly with a look of ecstasy.

"Ever since, my heart has belonged to you. No, perhaps even earlier, I have harbored affections for you."

"Ah, uh—"

"It is all because my beloved Haruomi asked that I stopped the battle, you know?"

"....."

This was the result of Hal following President M's advice, to go crazy to his heart's content during the difficult battle.

After some twists and turns, Princess Yukikaze had declared her love for Hal and totally surrendered the battle, resulting in the current situation.

That being said, the princess did not cling to Hal at all times.

Sometimes she would return to the Old Tokyo Concession, or elsewhere on Earth, the sea of stars, or long expeditions transcending dimensions.



Then she would come back to see Hal.

"B-But I already have Juujouji..."

"Kissing Yukikaze by force when you already have a love interest? Fufufu. It is only after entering this kind of relationship with you that I have discovered, Haruomi, you are quite a Casanova. You lecher."

"Ah, oh no."

From her words alone, one might think Princess Yukikaze was reprimanding Hal.

However, the princess was gazing gently at Hal with steady sexiness in her eyes. To think that the maiden dragon king with a personality as straight as an arrow would have such a side to her.

In addition, the princess even said this, "Besides, Haruomi, how many times have I told you that I couldn't care less if you have other women? Rather, as Yukikaze's husband, it is only right that you have concubines numbering a hundred or two."

"....."

"Have as many affairs as you wish, but in the end—Return to Yukikaze's bosom."

"!?"



Still riding Hal, the princess was under the same blanket as him.

She gently hugged Hal's head against her chest. Haruga Haruomi's face was directly pressed against her flat chest that was definitely nowhere near voluptuous!

(Choopoi!?)

A word of unknown meaning almost slipped out of his mouth.

The princess' chest was very petite yet full of overwhelming acceptance. It was enough to make Hal, who considered himself firmly in the "large" camp if he had to choose between large or small, slowly lean towards neutrality.

Every time he had intimate contact with the princess, Hal would feel this deeply.

Physical quantity of flesh was too low a bar for Princess Yukikaze.

A brief tangent. Recently, the angel on Earth—the junior student Shirasaka Hazumi's chest had matured substantially, showing a trend of catching up to her cousin, hence Princess Yukikaze was the most slender girl in Hal's circle—

*No matter what.* Hal thought.

*Letting her have her way with me like this isn't half bad... No no no.*

"Hey Princess. Your suggestion is great, but it's totally beyond a little guy like me, or rather, it doesn't suit—"

"Fufufufu. What a weirdo. Your wife Yukikaze is already not bothered by it."

"Like I said, we're not married!"

"That can be solved by getting married right away. By the way, having dragged for this long, it is time to consummate the husband and wife relationship. Yukikaze shall offer everything to you."

"C-Could you stop trying to destroy my self-control, okay!?"

Hal and Princess Yukikaze were enjoying sweet times together. Then.

The bedroom door suddenly opened.

In entered Juujouji Orihime. His childhood friend Asya was also here. Seeing the dragon king and the Tyrannos "acting lovey-dovey" in bed, the two witches stared in wide-eyed surprise.

"I should have known! Haruomi-kun, what are you two doing!?"

"How dare you openly engage in impure interactions between genders in broad daylight~~~~! Even if God might allow it, I, Asya-san, shall not forgive you, Haruomi~~~~!"

The two uninvited guests screamed and scolded.

Although it was the beginning of a new conflict, Hal no longer needed to fight his own self-control. Hal inhaled deeply, finally getting a chance for a breather.



## Part 3

"Sheesh. That Haruomi bastard, always acting so submissive submissive submissive whenever he meets her!"

Asya shouted in anger.

She was eating and drinking ravenously at the counter of M, a cafe that did not sell alcoholic beverages, in front of Tokyo New Town's Narihirabashi station.

Running counter to contemporary trends of this era's flourishing cafes, this shop employed Shouwa period ambiance and classy interior decor as its selling point.

Naturally, smoking was allowed in the cafe. There was no separate smoking zone. Neither was there any non-smoking zone.

Shopkeeper M was manning the counter.

"Oh? I heard that the princess ran over to Haruga's home yesterday?"

Shopkeeper M. Naturally, this was President M from before.

President M started working here as soon as she graduated. After just one week, the owner already appointed her as the shopkeeper and even allowed her to change the cafe's name.

"Getting a monster girl who lives only for battle and adventure to fall head over heels for him, and even made her his commuting wife, that guy did pretty well, I'd say."

"I-Isn't this your fault, Shopkeeper!?"

"Oh dear, how so?"

"Before the battle, didn't you give Haruomi advice along the lines of 'follow your feelings and go crazy to your heart's content!?' That's why that bastard Haruomi did something so unlike him, kissing someone...!"

"If you put it that way, I really can't refute you..."

Shopkeeper M gave a perfunctory response to the blame-assigning Asya.

The counter was covered with food. Spaghetti neapolitan served on a hotplate. Vanilla ice cream with pancakes. Egg salad sandwich. Pork chop cutlet sandwich. Toasted sandwich. Western-style omelet rice with ketchup. Cream soda. Furthermore, there were very popular items that were available in spite of the cafe setting, such as tempura dishes, a miso pork chop set, hamburger steak with rice, plum seaweed tea, etc.

All were ordered by Asya. And there was more.

"Thank you for waiting. Here's your French toast and large fries."

The waitress bringing the food over was Asya's acquaintance.

Funaka-san, the twintailed girl who ended up assigned to the same class this year. There was another waitress as well.

"This is Shopkeeper M's special handmade soba noodles and mini tuna ricebowl meal set, limited to ten orders every day. By the way, Asya-san, I will be heading to the main office later."

The short-haired girl, Mutou-san, deftly placed the food on the table.

These two girls were still working part-time at GUILD, in charge of helping with handling clerical work for the main office and various offices in the Kantou region.

Something had changed, while others had not.

After the two waitresses went over to serve other customers, Shopkeeper M slowly started to speak. "However... Let me tell you this. You act so entitled while grumbling about the relationship between Haruga and the princess, but you don't have any legitimate or necessary right to complain."

Stab! Feeling her soul about to get pierced, Asya shuddered.

"Because you and Haruga are merely childhood friends."

"I-I am only concerned about their effect on public morals, they'll be a bad influence on children!"

"Shut up and listen, okay? If we use a certain famous romantic comedy as an analogy for the current situation, Princess Yukikaze would be Lum and Haruga's lover, Orihime-san, would be Shinobu."

"I-I don't think children nowadays have read this manga!"

"Those who haven't read Taka●● Rumiko-sensei's representative work are ignorant and lacking in common sense, forget about them. In any case, we have a young maiden is not human but super beautiful as the wife who moves in by force, as well as the Earthling lover. These two characters are the leads in the romantic comedy. As for you... a side character who shows up every now and then."

"Guha!?"

"If you hide your feelings for Haruga at the bottom of your heart like the dear little angel, 'avoiding action and saying wrong things,' the type to stay by his side always... Perhaps, there's a chance of trailing number one as number two or three, then making a sudden comeback in the final round."

"Oooh."

"Or like little miss Luna, biding her time while she waits for rivals to fail or destroy themselves, calmly thinking 'oh well, even if he marries someone else, it'll be fine as long as I do a illicit & kidnap marriage later on', then you'll have a pretty good chance too in the future."

"Ooooooooooh."

"But in the end, you're simply here, eating like mad while wallowing in self-pity and despair, grumbling nonstop... If you flame someone anonymously on the internet, how will that solve love problems in the real world?"

"Ugugugugu!"



"But speaking of which, you totally lost in love a year and a half ago. Give up the past and move on, finding a new romance might be more productive..."

"@※○△□ ! ? "

Asya wailed unrecognizably and collapsed her head on the counter.

"By the way, why didn't that Haruga guy come this morning? Lately, he has been coming here for breakfast when he doesn't have school on weekends."

"Oh, that's right!"

Shopkeeper M's question prompted Asya to bounce up in surprise.

"That bastard Haruomi took the chance to ask Orihime-san out on a date. He said 'Just the two of us, let's go out on Saturday tomorrow!'"

"Oh dear, is that so?"

"Yes, it's true. I overheard them chatting at Haruomi's house yesterday."

" ... "

"I knew this would happen some day. That's why I've been building cordial relations with Princess Yukikaze. I'm gonna ask Rushalka to deliver a message and secretly tell the princess about this. I hope their sweet little rendezvous turns into a big incident that'll shake the world!"

"Girl, you need to put your efforts in the right direction..."



## Part 4

The Saturday date arrived.

Hal and Juujouji Orihime could finally spend time together for once, without anyone else interfering.

"So, Haruomi-kun? What excuse did you find this time?"

"Nothing, the princess was in my bed before I knew it... You know, right? Walls and locked doors mean nothing to her."

"I know, but your complacency is part of the reason!"

One could consider it a date for explaining and apologizing too.

Trying hard to plead with the sulking Orihime, he had to find a way to make her go "there's helping it" and forgive him. This had happened so many times over the past year and a half already.

Incidentally, in the beginning—

'I know you were cornered during the battle with the princess, b-but why did you kiss her!?'

'She, sh-sh-sh-she said she is your wife!? H-Have you and I divorced already—No! Speaking of which, we aren't married at all yet!'

Pretty much like that.

However, whether Princess Yukikaze or Hannibal, negotiation and friendship building were necessary against enemies who could not be handled by force alone.

Thanks to Orihime agreeing to this point, GUILD was able to develop so smoothly now.

Today, the two of them went out on a date early in the morning.

They had agreed to meet up at ten in the morning, to watch a movie

then have lunch at a trendy cafe.

(Recently, Hal and Orihime both liked to visit the M, the cafe run by Shopkeeper M, but they unanimously decided it was not right for a date. Hence, the two of them went to a cafe at Kiyosumishirakawa to have a light lunch, a place which was not especially fun but at least they would not be running into people they knew.)

Then they went to a seaside park at Gasai—

This park had a huge lawn, facing Tokyo Bay.

And it was quite close to Shin-Kiba too. It was here when Hal, Orihime and Asya met for the first time and were attacked by Raptors.

"The place where Hazumi was captured was at a pier nearby, right?"

"Indeed. On further thought, that happened so long ago."

There were no clouds in the sky on this day in early March.

The weather tended to seesaw between warm and cold, but today's weather was excellent.

Warm. The wind was very gentle. It was totally spring weather. Hal and the smiling Orihime were strolling on the lawn on this holiday.

Their conversation was not particularly interesting.

But incredibly, just being by Orihime's side made Hal felt very contented.

Presumably, Orihime felt the same. He really wished such days could continue forever, but—

"It's almost time for you... to depart, right?"

"Yeah. GUILD has developed very smoothly, so it's fine for me to leave Earth. I'm about to go on a journey of exploration."

Hal calmly described his plan.

"If in the long run, GUILD is to fight dragon king-class enemies and Tyrannoi who'll come into being sooner or later, in addition to Asya and me..."

"We might need more dragonslaying runes—"

"That's why I have to go find them. It'd be a different matter if we could live forever without any chance of dying by accident."

"..."

"Anyway, I'd like to check out Mars or Venus first, which are closer, then beyond the solar system. One day, I'll have to go to the vast universe outside the galaxy—maybe even to another dimension."

Beyond Earth, dragons made expeditions to the sea of stars or alternate dimensions.

Hal had heard about this more than once. However, he never expected himself to step into that territory too.

He planned on leaving the Rune of the Twin Katana at Tokyo for now.

This way, even if he lost his life during his explorations, he would still be able to leave the power of dragonbane with his friends...

"We will need flints in the future too, and maybe I'll even discover a secret technique allowing me to be reborn in a better body. Also, though Asya's current level as Tyrannos isn't that high, so dragonification isn't an issue... One day, she might end up how I used to be."

Slowly losing memories, even the body turning into a dragon.

Once that happened, a new hybrid dragon would be born, and with it, Hal's childhood friend would be lost.

"I think the best way to handle issues in this area is to search for knowledge of Ruruk Soun outside of Earth."

How incredible. Hal smiled wryly.

After doing so much labor that was not his style, Haruga Haruomi finally returned to his original career.

Namely, a treasure hunter and explorer.

Probably because of that, he felt unbelievably relaxed and liberated even though he was about to set off to an unknown world.

Orihime gazed at Hal with a smile—Past tense. Her gaze instantly turned sharp, startling Hal.

Hal braced himself, was she finally going to ask about *that*?

"Then the one leading the way for you would be Princess Yukikaze..."

"I... I can't help it. Forget about Sophocles who can't be located. I am heading somewhere no human had ever gone before, and Hannibal has GUILD work to do."

Hal forced a smile to block Orihime's sigh.

"It's not like I could ask anyone else—Eh?"

He suddenly felt a pulse from the rune that was paired with his Bow.

Hal immediately looked up at the sky. A small dot of light was approaching from the western sky—the direction from the Arrow user's residence at the Old Tokyo Concession...

"Princess Yukikaze is coming! Why!?"

"H-Haruomi-kun, did you tell her you'll be here!?"

"No way! I tricked her, saying I'll be dealing with desk work at the main office!"

"Anyway, let us hide first! That aquarium looks good! It's near too!"

It was like last time when they were attacked by Raptors at Shin-Kiba.

The two of them had sprinted at full speed to evade dragons. But last time, Hal tripped along the way, almost dooming them both.

This time, they ran together.

People spending a leisurely weekend at the park looked at them questioningly.

"By the way, Haruomi-kun, I thought of something!"

The athletic Orihime with excellent physical stamina said joyfully.

A sprint of this level was not very exhausting for her.

"That extraterrestrial expedition, why don't I come along too!?"

"W-What are you talking about!?"

As for Hal, his physical stamina was still a normal person's, disregarding magic and secret techniques. Hal was already panting heavily when he jumped in surprise.

"It will be a very tough journey!"

"Don't worry, Akuro-Ou will be there, and you too, Haruomi-kun. More importantly, the reliable dragon princess will lead the way for us!"

*This move, huh?* Hal laughed.

Hearing that her rival had proposed this, Princess Yukikaze might be taken aback.

Hal definitely thought the idea was not bad at all. In any case, the journey would most likely be filled with challenges. In that case, perhaps the more companions the better...

"Why not ask Asya too, while we're at it?"

"Good idea. She will surely manage to find delicious food there and cook for us!"

On July 1999, dragonkind returned to Earth.

After that, more than twenty years passed by within the blink of an eye. Humans resurrected artificial dragons—the magic beasts,

leviathans, also known as "serpents"—as a means to oppose dragonkind.

Currently, great changes were occurring in the way mankind was surviving on Earth.

Thrown into the very center of this vortex was Haruga Haruomi. Laughing with the girl who was his reliable partner, he imagined the scenery of the stars far beyond.





The journey was soon about to begin.



# Afterword

Asya: "So with that, the concluding Volume 8!"

President M: "Finally on sale."

Asya: "It's been so long... since the previous volume."

President M: "This is a secret, but the manuscript itself was done a long time ago."

Asya: "Specifically, it was ● months ago...?"

President M: "Pretty much before ●●● when the weather was officially starting to warm up, I suppose?"

Asya: "I don't think the author remembers clearly anymore."

President M: "Oh well, although there were many things to prepare, taking a lot of time, at least they succeeded in bringing Volume 8 to release for sale!"

Asya: "Woohoo!"

President M: "No need for manners tonight, just cut loose."

Asya: "But Prez, this is the final volume. My presence need no explanation, but why is it that even you, President M, are showing up in the afterword? Wouldn't it be better to have main characters?"

President M: "Fool. This is approved by the author. There is no problem at all."

Asya: "Why!?"

President M: "The author suddenly realized what Volume 8 lacked was screen time for me. Since it's already the end, might as well take this opportunity to write more of what he wanted to write."

Asya: "Is it because a character that's difficult to pin down like you,

Prez, reminiscent of 'super famous person in real life' can't casually show up anymore, so he has to make the most of this opportunity?"

President M: "Yes yes yes, that's it."

Asya: "Then it can't be helped. Okay, it's the last volume, let's go full gusto!"

President M: "In this series, the developments were not planned in much detail in advance... Only the ending was decided early to define the general direction."

Asya: "Oh, I heard that none of the editors believed it."

President M: "When the author said he'll go the *Uru●●●ra* route in the end, everyone thought he was joking."

Asya: "Surprisingly, it really went down that route."

President M: "There was that sudden Angel-chan special, but only things of this sort tend to go according to plan."

Asya: "I heard that what the author really wanted to write was a relaxed romantic comedy that's popular in the industry."

President M: "He definitely did say that."

Asya: "'Battle scenes are exhausting to write. Let's make it more relaxed'."

President M: "Then a few years went by... Popular trends went to 'accidentally ending up in an alternate world and easily setting off on a path of success' so no matter what, this story isn't going anywhere along the popular route."

Asya: "I can't believe a story where the author kept doing whatever he wanted actually concluded with the planned ending."

President M: "It's all thanks to the caring readers."

Asya: "Please let us thank all of you right here and now."

President M and Asya: "Thank you very much!"

Asya: "By the way, I heard that editing of Volume 8 took place simultaneously with a certain series that's being published by a certain publisher."

President M: "Oh, the one that can even kill gods."

Asya: "When the author first transferred to another company in the same industry, his first editor, a certain Mr. I, said 'You could write a story in the same style as *Ca●●●●ne!*, you know?'..."

President M: "A certain godslaying series, right?"

Asya: "Even if the setting is similar, if the story develops and ends the same way, it won't be interesting anymore, so the author placed some kind of curse on Haruomi over here."

President M: "In other words, the main character is a weak boy with empty knowledge who could never kill a god."

Asya: "It just so happens that a certain series reached the point when the godslayers are in a battle royale. If Haruomi was in it, he'd most likely get kicked out right away."

President M: "The author did mention before that's the kind of existence Haruga is."

Asya: "But getting kicked out instead of killed is even more..."

President M: "But you're not one to kill a god either, right?"

Asya: "Oh!? I think I'm not that bad, actually! In-story, I've been praised as the genius witch many times!"

President M: "The author apparently said 'Asya is too good at using cheap tricks'."

Asya: "I-I-It's clearly a description of the female protagonist played by Gakki in the current popular television drama, hearing that really pisses me off!"

President M: "A prodigy who has reached the limits of humanity but totally not cut out to exceed limits. Using this kind of lineup as the main characters, this series would be a so-called unconventional battle story."

Asya: "By the way, *Leviathan of the Covenant* has a lot of references paying tribute to entertainment from a past age, such as table-top RPGs. If those totally sailed over your head or if you're interested, please go search up what kind of game they are."

President M: "In the past, there were many specialized monthly magazines about them."

Asya: "Recently, *The Call of Cthulhu* has gotten pretty famous... Right?"

President M: "The likes of Nyarlathotep or Tsathoggua get mentioned all over the place, it's pretty widespread right? Anyone who got all the references the author borrowed from *D&D*, *Rune Quest*, *GURPS*, *Shadow Run*, *Foreigner*, etc etc, would be pretty hardcore."

Asya: "Actually, the biggest reference is the dragonslaying game, *Road to Kingship*."

President M: "Translated to English, it'd be something like *Roads to Lord*."

Asya: "Back during the author's student days, he frequented Yuuentai, a game company, that had created a game with that same name."

President M: "But back then, the production line had already stopped. Later on, the author went to another company and participated in TRPG creation with a certain Mr Itou Hiro to earn pocket money—Apparently something like that happened, or maybe not..."

Asya: "So even that experience got turned into a reference to use in

his work, how incredible."

President M: "By the way, although it's not a game, Hannibal-san's election is inspired by the foreign novel *Wild Cards* which is apparently receiving a television adaptation."

Asya: "Oh, it's the same guy who wrote the super popular series *A Game of Thrones*."

President M: "Yes yes yes. It's a shared universe of novels using Japan as a stage with G. R. R. Martin as the organizer. It started with American writers playing a table-top RPG with American comic superheroes and then novelizing it... I could keep going about this all day long."

Asya: "There's never enough time to say everything, but—"

President M: "It's time to say goodbye."

Asya: "Everybody, My reincarnations, the second and third Asya will probably make their active appearances in the author's new works. Please continue to support us...!"

President M: "I don't think the author is going to write another character with as little feminine charm as you, right?"

Asya: "W-What the hell are you talking about!?"

President M: "Or maybe he'll accidentally create this kind of female character again...?"

Asya: "Ngggggg! W-Whatever, anyway. Dear readers, thank you all for the support you've given for so many years, and all the best for the future! I shall return! Hey Solomon, I will definitely be back—!"

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